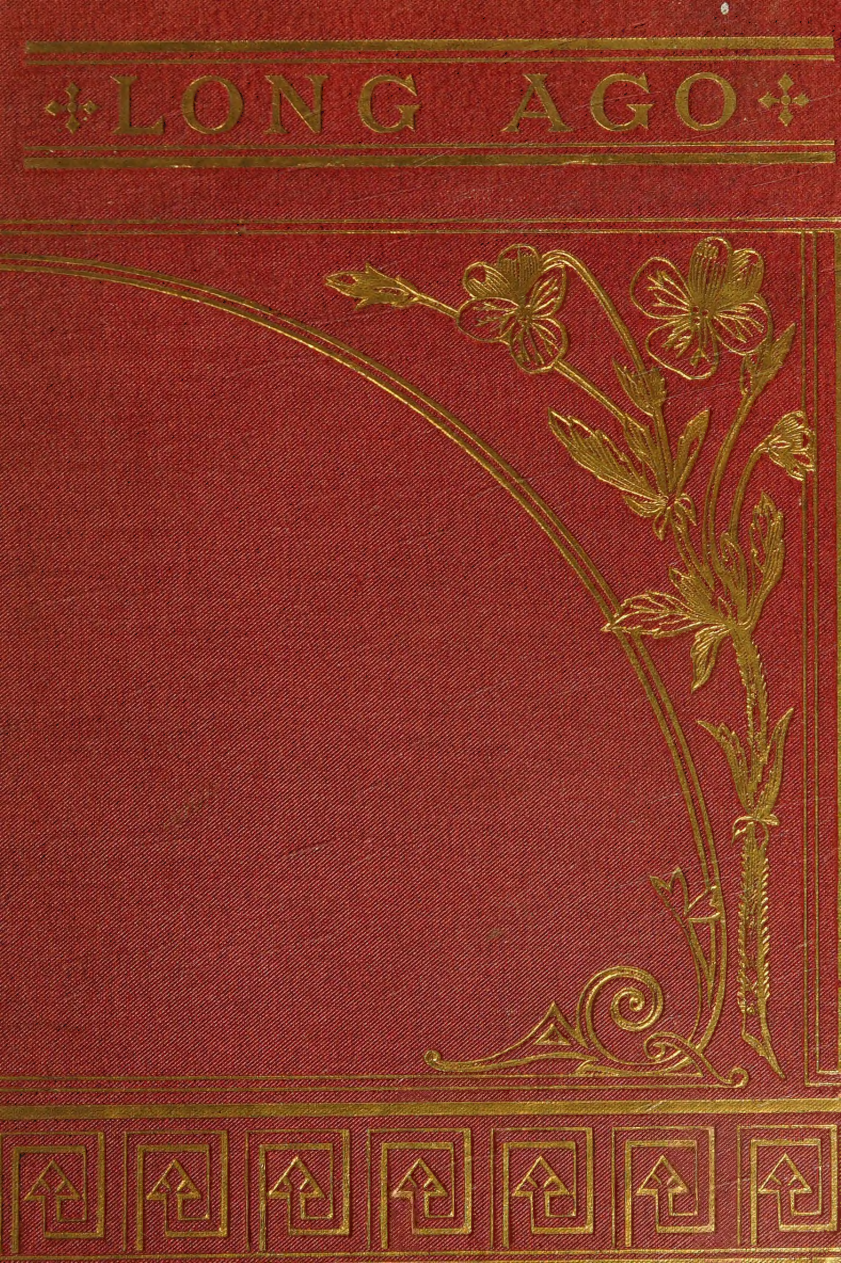
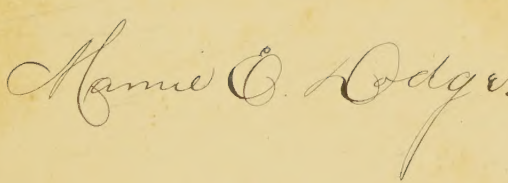
LONG AGO

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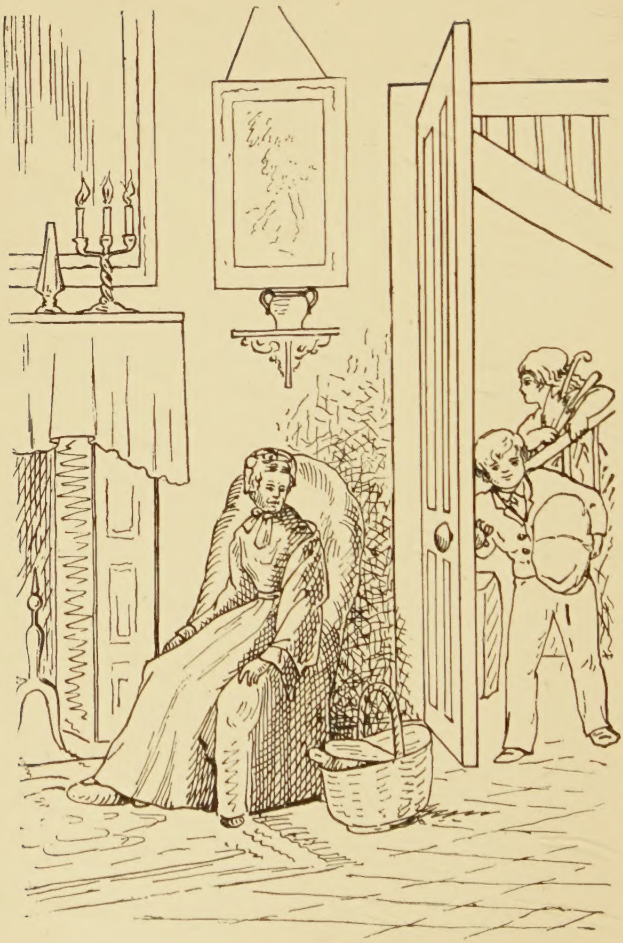

THE ARRIVAL,

LONG AGO:

A YEAR OF CHILD LIFE.

BY

ELLIS GRAY.

ILLUSTRATED FROM DESIGNS BY SUSAN HALE, JULIA P. DABNEY, AND ELLEN DAY HALE.

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TO

MAY, GEORGE, AND HARRY,

FOR WHOM

MAMMA RECALLS THE

LONG AGO.

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TO-DAY.

"WERE you ever a little girl?"
A gentle voice softly said;
"Did you love to read fairy tales?
And what were the games you played?"

Was I ever a little girl?
So far away does it seem,
That the memory when it comes
Is like a forgotten dream.

Like the child in the ballad old,
We were brothers and sisters seven;
There are three in far-distant lands,
And one is at rest, in heaven.

And dear Hetty, they say, looks old;
Her brown hair, like mine, is gray!
I remember only the beauty
Who sailed with her love away

To that far-distant Eastern shore,
The land of Golden Cathay,
Where our purple sunsets are dawns,
Our midnight their bright noonday.

Brother Dick was a restless lad,
And wandered both far and wide ;
But his sleep is quite peaceful now,
On the shadowy green hillside.

Long, long years have passed since we left
The dear old home on the hill ;
But I think in my dreams, sometimes,
That we are the children still :

The familiar voices I hear,
So merrily whoop and call,
Playing hide-and-go-seek in the dusk,
Ere the evening shadows fall.

And I stretch out my hand to touch
The one that is nearest me,
And awake with a start, to know
We 're scattered on land and sea.

They *are* fresh young voices I hear,
The same merry games they play ;
But 'tis children's children so blithe
That I am watching to-day.

E. G.

CHAPTER I.

LONG AGO.

Long ago, — I say, long ago, because, my darlings, any thing that happened when I was a little girl would seem long ago to you; though to me every thing I am going to tell you is more distinct than the Great Fire or the Peace Jubilee.

Well, then, long ago, there were two little girls who lived in a big, old-fashioned house, with lots of brothers and sisters, a father and mother, a dear aunt, and black Dinah who had been papa's nurse. There was something special about these two little girls, or I never should think of telling their story. They were twins; which doesn't mean, however, that they were in the least alike, except in loving each other and having their birthday parties together. They each had good long names of their own, given by their godfathers and godmothers in baptism; but then nobody thought of calling them Henrietta and Eliza-

beth; it was always Hetty and Ellie. Indeed, I do not believe they would have come right off, if they had been called any other way, even to dinner, because they would have been obliged to stop and think who was wanted.

I can't tell you which was the prettier, because opinions differ so much about beauty; but I will tell you how they look in "the picture that hangs upon memory's wall." Hetty had thick, light-brown hair, straight and lustrous, the kind that makes lovely braids; so soft that it would roll in great hollow curls, with golden lights in the sunshine, whenever Aunt Margaret would take the trouble to roll them up. Every thing about Hetty was dainty and nice, from her little rosebud mouth, her straight, little nose, blue eyes and rosy-pink cheeks, to her finger-tips and almond-shaped nails, that were always clean, and her polka-boots that never got stubbed at the toes.

Little Ellie silently worshipped her sister, because she was so exactly like the great French doll, Lady Blanche, and tried to model her behavior and dress after Hetty's, with about as much success in one direction as in the other; for it was just as impossible to make a quiet, orderly, well-behaved, pattern child out of heedless, impulsive, boisterous Ellie, as to smooth her dark tangle of curls into glossy braids,

change her earnest, gray eyes into China blue, or make a rosebud out of the large mouth, with its sensitive lips and faultless teeth, which redeemed the size and irregularity of features whose expression changed with every passing emotion.

When Ellie was sad, she was in the depths indeed. She might have been the original of the young lady who, at the mature age of seven, discovering in one day that the world was hollow and her doll stuffed with sawdust, desired to go into a nunnery. But sunshine always followed shadow so quickly that, before the sad eyes had grown weary over imaginary woes or real mishaps, some bit of remembered or plotted fun would make them twinkle with glee, a bright, beaming smile lighten the sombre visage, and a hearty laugh that made the house ring again would tell Dick, her pet brother and fellow-conspirator, that he was forgiven, if the woe had been of his causing, as was apt enough to be the case.

It would take about ten books as big as this one to tell half the doings of these little folks that I can remember. But I can remember that I used to think it good fun to find a Christmas in a story-book; so we will have two Christmases in *Long Ago*, — one to begin and one to end with, — and put in between as much of a year's life and love, fun and frolic, doings and misdoings, as we can.

Please, then, consider yourselves introduced, all round, to Ellie and Hetty, Dick, Dinah, and such other of the little folks as may tumble in unawares, with grandma, Aunt Margaret, papa and dear mamma, Uncle Will, and all the rest.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL.

THANKSGIVING had been a disappointment this year, — the first since the children could remember that they had not passed at Grandma Peyton's. Poor, dear Madame Peyton, the proudest, stateliest, loveliest grandma in the world, who seemed quite above evils and ails common to mortals, had been laid up with a severe rheumatic fever, just as if she had been Mrs. Jones or Sally Brown.

Mamma, at short notice, went to Kadesh to take care of her, and comfort grandpa, who missed, sadly enough, the faithful, gentle hands that had never failed, morning, noon, or night, for forty years, to minister to him in his blindness.

Mehitable grumbled a little at first. "'Twa'n't fit Miss Adams sh'd come up from Th' Cedars ter take care Miss Peyton! Es if I couldn't ha' done a little nussin' 'twixt an' 'tween th' cookin', th' dairy, an' th' cleanin'; howsomdever, folks as isn't wanted up stairs kin fin' somethin' to do down stairs, I reck'n, 'thout suckin' ther thum's!"

But, like many another, Mehitable's growl was

worse than her bite. Before Madame Peyton was on her feet again, the faithful old servant was only too glad of Mrs. Adams's presence, as they mutually shared the burden.

November went by, slowly and painfully; but early in December, the improvement was so marked that there was every reason to think that the household would keep Christmas together at The Cedars.

By the 15th, letters came which sent Hetty and Ellie dancing and singing from attic to cellar: —

"To-morrow night,
By candle light,
Our dear mamma we'll see!
Since she's been gone,
We've been forlorn,
For weeks full three times three!"

It seemed as if to-morrow night never would come. Dinah had polished every tin and bit of brass in the big, old house, till they shone and glittered in the dancing firelight. The fire-dogs were well piled with hickory logs, that snapped and sparkled with almost conscious merriment. Hetty had dusted and arranged and re-arranged, for the twentieth time, the books and knick-knacks in mamma's own room. Ellie had coaxed Dinah to make cream toast and waffles, and with her own hands, trembling with eagerness, had turned out the quivering apple jelly that she had

helped to make. The chickens were done to a turn; the coffee filled the air with fragrance.

Would they never come! It had grown dark rapidly; but the little faces still clustered eagerly at the great bay window, watching for Dick's signal. It came at last, a regular "Hip! hip! hurrah!" ending in a "tiger!" which Uncle Will had taught him. Then the big carriage, with its twinkling lights, turned into the long drive-way, Dick racing ahead, so that he stood at the door-step, ready to help his mother out; while papa and Uncle Will handed out baskets and parcels, shawls and bundles; and last, if not least, the dear invalid herself, and grandpa too, — the very best surprise in the world. Such a hugging and kissing as everybody got! Dinah and Aunt Margaret came in for their share; for didn't Uncle Will, sly fellow that he was, insist on every one's kissing all round?

Dinah laughed and chuckled till her best, big, white turban, newly starched in honor of the occasion, quivered and shook to the very top knot. "Wite folks and brack folks, brack folks and wite folks! Pretty piccaninny las' ter take de tase out! Hi, Massa Will, g'long wid yer nossence! I'se hugged and squeezed and spanked yer mor'n tousan times. Yer all chilluns to ole Dinah an' Miss Peyton; we aint gwine to loose de fun."

The great, loving, old, black giant took the slender, white-haired lady in her arms, as if she had been a baby, without heeding Uncle Will's protest, or papa's either for that matter, never stopping till she had carried her burden straight to the big arm-chair in front of the fire. No one could touch a sandal or a wrapping but old Dinah. The strong hands were deft and tender ones; and by the time mamma, between Ellie's love fits, with Fred and Harry climbing over her, had been relieved of her bonnet and shawl by thoughtful Hetty and her snow-boots by Dick, grandma and grandpa, too, were ready for such a supper as hungry travellers could do justice to.

"I say, grandma, are these bundles yours? Shall I carry them upstairs?" shouted Dick, after a brief investigation as to quantity, and a few proddings to ascertain quality.

"Well, what do you think, Master Dick? If you can guess the contents without opening, you shall be excused from carrying the same any farther than the store-room."

"Come, Hetty and Ellie, let's have a guessing match, three apiece all round. We'll leave out grandma's cap-box and the valise and the shawl-bundle [shawl-straps were not in those days] and the pretty carpet-bag. Hollo! I say, that's the one Aunt Margaret was embroidering. That's a W, too, and I

thought it was an M! Don't see what grown-up folks want to give things that fashion for. Uncle Will isn't her uncle."

"Hush, Dick, of course she's his aunt, and he's her uncle. Isn't she our aunt, and isn't he our uncle, I'd like to know?"

"Ha, ha! Well, well, little mother, you shall make out the family tree,—

> 'An' we'll build the foine house
> Fur our ancister's sate.'

Now, what's left? Two bags tied with strings, a firkin and a big basket. My first guess for the white bag, —butternuts!"

"O Dick Adams! You poked,—you knew what it was."

"Of course I poked, but lots of things feel knobby and queer besides butternuts."

"Well, that's the white bag; now I'll guess the brown one."

It didn't take much poking for Ellie to shout, "Popcorn!" Then there was another dance for joy and a shout to Dinah.

"Get down the popper: we must do one ear, please, before bed-time."

"Bed-time! you chilluns! clar for't! it's getting up

time a'mos' now; jess Miss Peyton say. Dis chile'll pop corn all night if yer ax her."

"Please, please say yes, grandma, dearie! Mamma, darling, mayn't we, just one? It can go for a grand, military salute in honor of your safe return."

"Mamma's laughing, Dick, that means yes, I know. Now for the bucket, —

'The tight-covered bucket
The wooden-bound bucket
I know it full well!'"

"I say, Ellie, don't be 'sassy.'"

"Stop, stop, Dick! I know, I know! It's some of Mehitable's apple sauce, real Shaker. I declare I can smell it now."

"Three cheers for Mehitable! I'll never put another burr in her net shawl as long as I live. She's no end jolly not to hold a grudge."

"The big basket is apples."

"No, guess again."

"As if grandma would bring coal to Newcastle that fashion!"

"Well, it's fruit of some sort, and heavy as lead."

"Isn't it the year for the big pear-tree, grandma? Yes, I know it is. O Dick, they are splendid! I know just how Mehitable cooks them, in a great, brown bake-kettle with a cover on it; she puts it in

the coals, and fills the cover with coals and lets 'em stand till you can see through 'em."

"The coals or the pears, Ellie?"

"The pears, you stupid boy! Dinah will know; boys never *do* understand things."

"All right, Ellie. There's one thing we do understand first-rate, however, — how to make good things vanish. Don't we Dinah?"

"He, he! Marsa Dick; dat's 'de troof."

One more basket, the heaviest of all; but no one could guess, so grandma said it must go into her room for safe keeping.

The disappointment did not last long; for Dinah came in with the popper and there was the bag to untie, and the red and white ears to shell.

How they popped corn, and ate corn and milk, and made candy corn-balls, as if chickens and cream-toast had never been.

It was a merry, merry evening. Nobody said "eight o'clock" or "nine o'clock" or any sort of o'clock, till the funny little cuckoo in the hall said "ten;" then everybody all at once started for bed. The little folks felt real grown-up for once in their lives, and the big folks said they were all children, and must go to bed early.

Ellie whispered to Hetty and Dick, as they went up stairs, that it was just like a Thanksgiving postscript.

Dick agreed, adding that it was worth while to go without mamma for a little, just to see how nice it was to get her back again. This rather horrified the girls, who both exclaimed, —

"Why, Dick, aren't you ashamed? As if anything could make up for doing without mamma ever so little!"

"You see, girls, that wasn't quite original sin. I heard Uncle Will say something to Aunt Maggie about it's being so nice to get home again, a fellow didn't feel so bad about going away."

"Just as if Uncle Will would have said anything that way! Maybe he spoke the verses in Miranda Jones's scrap-book, —

'The hope of return
Takes the string from adieu.'"

"What sort of a 'string'? Blue, I guess, like the bag and Aunt Maggie's neck-ribbon."

"Did I say 'string'? I meant sting. You shouldn't laugh, Dick, for it is in 'Poems of Friendship and Love,' and I think it is lovely."

Ellie's sentimental effusions were very apt to get sadly tangled, and Dick never could miss a chance of tripping her up. On the whole she generally took it good-naturedly enough, with a "Now, Dick, do ee

don't," — a funny phrase of her babyhood which still lingered.

So they chatted together as they went up the long stairway, growing sleepy as they left the bright firelight and the merriment which had kept them awake so far beyond their usual sleepy time.

In ten minutes they were all in dream-land.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS COMING.

LATE to bed did not mean late to rise with these little folks though, for there was school all the same for next morning, and lessons to look over bright and early; so, even before the usual hour, Hetty and Ellie were curled up on the shaggy mat before the big fire in the dining-room, hands clasped around their knees in their favorite attitude.

It was a funny sight to see the two little figures bobbing and rocking like the queer Dutch tumble-dicks in the toy-shop, as they rehearsed their history lesson together.

"First William the Norman
Ascended the throne,
Then William, then Henry,
Then Richard, and John."

They went on swimmingly through the Stuarts, —

"First Jamie the Scotsman,
Then Charles whom they slew,
But had after Cromwell
Another Charles, Two."

"I say, Hetty!"

"No, not one word till we get to, —

'Victoria Queen,
The best ever seen.'"

The second trial brought both victoriously to Victoria.

The history lesson was safe for Mr. Parker, and they might chatter with a clear conscience while they waited for the big folks who were excusably tardy this once.

"O Hetty! I know we *are* going to have Christmas after all. Dinah says, 'Clar' out, chile!' all the time; so I know she is making something we are not to see. Papa looks funny whenever we say anything about Santa Claus. He pulls his face down and says, 'The days are degenerate; the revered St. Nicholas is dead through want of faith.'"

"Do you think, Ellie, there would be half so much fun just having presents on a table, the way Sarah Potter and Miranda Jones do New Year's?"

"No; it's just horrid. It's like going to a store, and buying things. I like delusions. Of course we know there isn't any Santa Claus really; but it's just splendid to hang up stockings, and have 'em 'ram jam full,' as Dick says, and all nobby. Then the little bits of things down at the very toe! Don't you remember, last year, we thought our stockings were all emptied, and there, just in the very tips, were those

dear little silver thimbles, with 'Hetty' and 'Ellie' on them?"

"Yes, indeed; and the year before the tiny rings, with the cunning little blue stones. I don't believe anything can be half so nice as stockings."

"I'm not so sure about that. Aunt Margaret is splendid for *get-ups;* and I just know something is going to be."

"Here comes Dick; let's ask him if he can guess."

"Dick, Dick! aren't we going to have Christmas?"

"Are we going to have stockings? Papa says we don't believe in Santa Claus, and that's the reason he isn't coming."

"Sha'n't you hang up your stocking, Dick? You did last year."

"O, bother! what do I want of a stocking? Leave that to sugar-plum babies, like Fred and Harry and May. I want a pair of skates and a new sled and a tool-chest, and a printing-press like Ned Borland's. How do you suppose they'd look in a stocking? I read once, in a book, about a fellow whose father used to give each of the boys a ten-dollar gold-piece for their Christmas. Put it in their bread and milk, and they spooned it out at the bottom. That was jolly! They bought just what they wanted, and no Santa Claus nonsense."

"Now, Dick Adams, you know you wouldn't like it. First place, it would take more than a ten-dollar gold-piece to buy any one of the things you want; and it's the love that goes into the planning and picking out, and sending home unbeknown, that makes things worth. Isn't it, Ellie?"

"I guess it is! Now Hetty and I both want new dolls, oh, *executionally!* but we would rather have rag dolls with tape hair, if mamma had picked them out and dressed them, than the shiniest, curly-headedest Paris doll in all the bazaar, that had just been *bought*, and didn't mean anything!"

At this moment old Dinah's voice came through the open door from the kitchen. "One ob you chiles mus' jes' scar' up an egg for Dinah! 'Clar' for 't, clean done forgott'n; dey warn't no egg for de coffee dis mornin'. Massa Will so p'tikler!"

"I'll go, Dinah. Come, Ellie, let's have a rummage."

"Just a minute, Hetty. I want to speak to Dick."

"Never mind, I'll get it; you need not come. I know where old Silvertop's nest is," and away flew Hetty.

"Now, little mother, out with it; some new scrape on hand, I suppose."

"It isn't a scrape at all; it's about Christmas. I was just saying —"

"I remember, — that you are '*executionally*' in want of a rag baby, if mamma will dress it; and you wouldn't take a French doll for a gift, eh?"

"Dick, you're too bad! Did I say 'executionally'? I meant excruciatingly; that's what Miranda Jones says. I don't know just what it means, but something a good deal. But, Dick, just a minute — is — there — ever — the least — bit of a chance of a French doll for either of us?" Here Ellie's gray eyes grew so big it was easy to guess where Uncle Will's pet name of "owlet" came from. "Of course we couldn't have two, for they cost, oh, ever so much! I just want to whisper one word before Hetty comes back. If anybody *should* think of it, — you know somebody *might*, — and then think again, and say no, because there's two of us, and we always have things just alike, and — "

"Well, little mother, what is it? Out with it. I hear Hetty; so make haste, if it is a secret."

"Hush-sh-sh! I mean if anybody should, you know. It would be most as good as two if Hetty had one, and she's ever so much carefuller than I am; and — I just as lief, and ever so much liefser, not have anything at all, if Hetty could have a real Paris doll. She makes lovely things for dolls, too; somehow mine always get crooked before they're done. I could look at hers always; and sometimes I know she'd let

me take it in my arms, and hug it softly, and shut its blue eyes, and put it in my rocking-cradle, and tie a blue ribbon in its curls, and — oh, it seems just as if it was really coming, Dick!"

But Dick was no longer in the dining-room. Ellie's rhapsody had been whispered to the four walls and the empty air, and, — is it possible? — unknown to her, to the dear papa whose slippered feet came noiselessly down the broad stairway, while Ellie followed her recreant confidant through the kitchen to the woodshed, triumphantly capturing him at last in the barn.

"I think, Dick Adams, you are just *tarantulizing*. I knew you'd be in the hayloft any way. O, goodie! I know. Hetty, you just carry Dinah the egg; then let's tell Dick what we want to do, because he'll want to help, too."

"Look out, Ellie, look out! I may bite. I'm a tarantula, I suppose, if I *tarantulize* you."

"Well, tantalize, then. The words tumble out before I get 'em fixed; but you know just the same. You're a tease! That's good English, I know. Now listen. Here's Hetty, and we must make haste before the bell rings."

"All right; I've the ears of a little pitcher."

"Well, we want to buy Dinah a little work-table. Don't you know, she hasn't had any since you took

hers for a rostern to speak 'My name is Norval,' and broke down?"

"Poh! it wasn't 'My name is Norval' that broke it down. It was 'A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!' I had to stamp, you know; and the old thing wasn't worth shucks. I scraped my leg, too, and tore my jacket, and broke the fat, brown teapot! O, dear! don't remind me of it. Didn't I have to go to bed before supper for a week? I say, Ellie, though, it's a *rostrum*, not a '*rostern*.' Go ahead."

"Well, down at Sharford's there's something splendid. It looks like an hour-glass, and is a table. It's covered with cloth, and has a ribbon round it, and a ruffle; and it's a beauty. I don't know how much it costs; but Hetty and I have got our money-boxes, and, if you help, we can get it for a Christmas present."

"If that's all you want, and you girls are any good with your needles, it needn't cost so very much. I know Ben Sharford. He makes the frames of those hour-glasses for his father. I've helped him lots of times. Could make one myself just as *aisy*. You girls get the stuff and the ribbons, I'll have the frame ready; Wednesday afternoon, we'll do it up in style. Have something stunning bright, — red and yellow."

"I know something splendid. If mamma would

give us some of the butterfly chintz that grandma had for curtains, oh, ages ago!"

"That's bright enough, I guess. We'll tie it with red ribbons, too."

"Won't it be nice, Hetty, not to spend all our money for Dinah's present? Perhaps we shall have enough for the beautiful white dove."

"What's that, Ellie?" said Dick.

"Hush-sh-sh! You promise not to tell?"

"Hark ye! no grave so silent, so profound."

"Hetty and I want to give mamma something just like her; and we've been everywhere, and yesterday I found just the thing. It's just like mamma when she sings to us at night, —

'There sitteth a dove
So fair and white,
All on a lily spray.'

It's a snow-white dove with its wings spread like mamma's white hands, and a violet ribbon round its neck, just the shade mamma wears. If we can get it, we are going to put it in the ivy, in the window, right where mamma's sewing-chair stands, so she can see it."

"H'm! Birds like that cost ever so much. Honor bright, I havn't got but ten cents in my box."

"I've got two quarters and a Canada shilling, and a new ten-cent piece; and Ellie has the silver dollar

Uncle Will gave her, and a new ten-cent piece. I don't know how much the bird costs, but isn't a dollar and a half, and three ten-cents, a good deal of money?"

"Anyhow we'll go round to old Peek's after school, and see. There's the breakfast-bell."

Dick turned a somersault, and with a merry shout, "Hurra! look out for the engine when the bell rings," went tsch, tsch, tsch, tsch, through the barn and the shed and the kitchen, Ellie for tender, and Hetty bringing up the rear as baggage. At the threshold of the dining-room they switched off to their respective places with the happy morning greeting to papa and mamma, Aunt Margaret, and Uncle Will, who was home for the holidays.

Brimful were the little heads and hearts with their loving secrets, but the broiled chicken and Dinah's hominy cakes kept every one busy; then school-time, dinner-time, school-time again, before a chance for a word together. They made the most of the spare half-hour before dark. Old Peek was interviewed; a crusty fellow he was in general, but little Ellie was a great favorite with the old man.

Many a pretty bird and squirrel he had rendered immortal in his fashion, when their thread of life had been untimely cut. Ellie's undisguised admiration of his skill (the old man himself always thought is

birds were a "a leetle more nat'ral than life") pleased him. When he heard the story of Christmas and the white dove for mamma, he wouldn't admit any doubt about money enough.

"Mebbe I mout git a smartish bit for 't, mebbe agin I moutn't. 'Twouldn't be fair, I s'pose, fur me ter gin it t' yer, 'twouldn't be yer present to yer mammy, 'twould be mine. Ho, ho! Ha, ha!"

"No, indeed, Mr. Peek! it would not do at all; we must buy it with our ownty donty money. But please just as cheap as you can. Here's our boxes; if there isn't money enough, we'll pay the rest just as soon as ever we get it."

"H'm, h'm! Master Richard, only ten cents in yourn! H'm, h'm, h'm! Fair and fair's alike. H'm, h'm, h'm! My bird. Guess thirty cents'll do. That's ten a piece. H'm, h'm, h'm!"

"Three times three and a tiger!" shouted Dick. It was given with a will, till the very tail of the parroquet on his shiny green bough trembled with the hearty uproar; a little out of proportion to the six-by-nine shop where Peek reigned with his stuffed companions, monarch of all he surveyed.

"The dove so fair and white," in a nest of cotton wool in Ellie's lunch-basket, reached its hiding-place in Dinah's room (of course she was in the secret) without mishap, though the children had to peep at

their treasure more than once to convince themselves their dream was a reality.

Mamma lent willing ear and helpful hands to the hour-glass table. Dick, who was already dexterous with tools, made a frame that was not very rickety. Uncle Will gave a few finishing touches, to make it safe for Dinah's funny little shade-lamp. The butterfly chintz was forthcoming in a gorgeousness beyond words to describe; yellow ground with butterflies of every hue, green, blue, and yellow, scarlet, gold, and black, real "emperors," and a few dragon-flies with impossible legs and horns to fill in.

Busily flew the needles; the crisp ruffles rivalled Dinah's best cap, while a scarlet ribbon from Aunt Margaret's store tied it in at the waist. She it was who suggested pockets round the upper edge, and popped something useful into every one; a huge, red tomato pincushion, a fat, well-stocked needle-book, a wax plum, and balls of colored cotton.

Dinah was to have Christmas anyway.

CHAPTER IV.

BLONDINE AND BLONDETTE.

O, the mysteries and surprises that were planned and carried out in that house! Such arch-hypocrites as those little folks became, and the big folks too. How blind everybody was, or pretended to be, when things stared them in the face that they were not meant to see. Even papa never asked for his slippers, when they were gone two whole days, that Schollp might be sure that the new ones would fit as easy as the old ones.

Whispered confidences, arch-conspiracies, were in order, as the week drew to a close. Such cutting round corners with inexplicable parcels; such arrivals at unearthly hours of the day and night; such suppressed screams when the wrong person came in at the wrong time! All with a vague faith, kept alive by Ellie, that somehow Christmas was to be kept, spite of papa's daily assertion, "No stockings! Santa Claus was smothered in Russia, in a narrow chimney."

It certainly was very strange. The back-parlor door-key mysteriously disappeared the day before Christmas; it was locked too, which made it more aggravating. Dick insisted that Uncle Will or Aunt

Margaret knew something about it, they looked so "uncommon innocent." But nothing could be proven.

At dessert that day, a mysterious and most enchanting little pink note was laid on each one's plate. They all read alike.

"Kriss Kringle's compliments. Christmas night, eight o'clock. N. B. Contributions received in the big clothes-basket behind the door, carefully directed, will reach their destination free of expense."

Every one at the table appeared equally surprised. It was a fortunate thing that dinner was so nearly over, — Ellie would certainly have disgraced herself. Dick was so knowing, and winked so emphatically, and kept up such a vigorous telegraphing, it was all Ellie could do "to behave."

Such queer bundles that might mean anything; such square boxes that might mean everything dear to childish hearts; such covered baskets and hampers as were piled into and around that basket before night! It wasn't easy to get through that entry, I assure you. It's a wonder those children got a wink of sleep, for the delicious ecstasy of excitement that filled heads and hearts.

Christmas morning at last! The basket was empty, the entry quite clear, the key of the back parlor had not turned up. A vague, delightful sense of mystery pervaded the whole house.

The children had their Merry-Christmas frolic, with Uncle Will, and the snow-balling; then there was the lovely service at the church, a visit to grandma and the Christmas dinner, while over and around and through it all was the wild, delightful anticipation of Kriss Kringle's mysterious reception.

At least ten minutes before eight, every chick and child, with papa and mamma and Dinah, were assembled in the front parlor, waiting the arrival of Kriss Kringle, or at least a message as to his whereabouts. Suddenly, as the cuckoo on the clock finished the last stroke of eight, and bobbed back into his nest, every light went out in the parlor. One moment of breathless, expectant silence, then the great folding-doors swung silently back, and a flood of light from the mysterious back parlor absolutely took their sight away for an instant. Wonder of wonders, a veritable Christmas-tree, glittering with colored tapers and sparklers! Festooned with snowflakes, it seemed to be; and such wondrous fruit as that fir-tree bore! Rosy apples and golden oranges, purple and amber grapes, might grow on earthly trees; but green angelica, candied fruits, and gilt cakes, shaped from every beast, bird, and fish that swims, flies, or creeps, glittering bon-bons and candy canes, tops and drums and jumping-jacks, — those grow on fairy trees. And

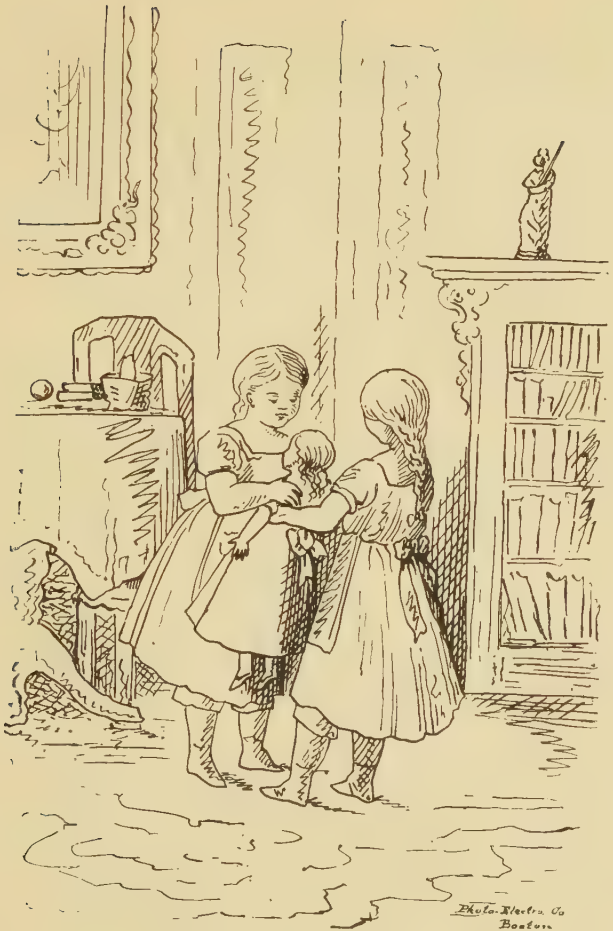
in and out the wreathed snowflakes (Dinah had been popping corn to some purpose), the blue and red and gold and silver balls, shining and twinkling like thousands of glad, happy eyes! Who *could* speak first? At last it was Ellie, oh, so softly!

"See, Hetty! See, Dick! See! There is

'The dove so fair and white,
All on a lily spray.'

Up at the very top! Do you see? I think it is going to fly right down into mamma's bosom! Its wings are all ready! It almost flutters!"

But the bird kept its airy perch, still with his snowy wings outspread, at once a welcome and a benediction. Then Kriss Kringle himself, who had stood quite still in the shadow of the tree till the first glamor was over, came forward for his greeting. A funny fellow he was, with his white beard and conical fur-trimmed hat and slouched boots. The pack on his back was full of sugar-plum ammunition, with which he pelted every one who came too near. His black eyes had a merry twinkle, suspiciously like Uncle Will's. He had a long, white staff, like an icicle, that served to take off and distribute the countless gifts that were hidden among the branches, and clustered at the foot of the tree.



BLONDINE.

Never was such a harvest; a dozen presents, at least, for everybody! Dinah's table found a place, and Dick's tool-chest and skates; books and games, and such pretty work-boxes for the girls. Aunt Margaret's present was in a wee bit of a box, but she seemed very happy, and blushed so prettily when Kriss Kringle gave it to her. Perhaps the whispered word in her ear had something to do with that. Ellie's bright eyes are turned once more to the beautiful dove. What else does the child see?

"Hetty, Hetty! Look, look! See, right under the dove's wing! A doll, a real Paris doll! O, her eyes are blue! They are open. Her hair is like gold. Her dress is all white, and silver, and blue. She is a fairy, or an angel. O Hetty darling, I am so glad! I knew it would come. Dear Kriss Kringle, may I take it in my arms, and give it to Hetty myself?"

Not a thought for herself had the dear child. Her flushed, eager face was radiantly happy, as the lovely doll was laid in her arms, to give to Hetty.

"O you sweet darling! I am going to kiss you, first; but Hetty is your mamma. She shall call you Blondine. You are just like Blondine, the Queen of the Silver Fairies."

Hours flew like minutes. The tree is stripped of its wondrous fruit; every one is laden with things useful and beautiful, and good to look at, and good to

eat. All this time, Hetty had insisted that Ellie should hold the beautiful Blondine, resolving in her own little heart that every other day Blondine should be Ellie's, and every other night sleep her side of the bed. Suddenly a loud ring at the hall door startled every one.

"Don't stir, Dinah," cried Ellie. "I know you are tired. I'll go."

The little girl pressed a tender, loving kiss on the dear Blondine's snowy forehead, laid the treasure in Hetty's arms, and flew to the door. She came back with a long box, so big she could hardly hold it. It was directed quite plainly,—

"Ellie Adams, with Kriss Kringle's compliments. Got carried to Kamtchatka by mistake."

What was coming now? Ellie's eyes look dangerously bright and large. She cannot trust herself to speak. She cannot even untie the string. Aunt Margaret comes to her aid; but no one but Ellie must lift the cover. What is this? Blondine is in Hetty's arms; and here is a second Blondine, so like the first, save that rose-colored ribbons take the place of azure, it would be difficult to distinguish them. The blue eyes look sweetly up to Ellie's; the rosy lips are parted and show four pearly teeth; soft, golden curls fall over the smooth, waxen shoulders. She, too, is a

Queen of the Silver Fairies. Blondette and Blondine,—twin dollies for the little, loving twin mammas.

Ellie's cup of joy was full indeed, as she clasped her own peerless beauty in her arms, saw Hetty with Blondine, and dear mamma with the white dove, whose snowy, outspread wings and fluttering, violet ribbons seemed a fit emblem of the fair, happy home and the unselfish love that dwelt within.

CHAPTER V.

HOLIDAY FUN.

Of course nothing could ever surpass Christmas day; but, after all, it was pretty nice to have the holidays and merry-making last till Twelfth-night, especially as Uncle Will had something new and fresh on hand for every day. Such pranks and capers as those children were put up to could never have originated outside of the madcap sailor boy's brain. They had negro minstrels, a cat concert, and an illustrated Chinese symphony after the fashion of "Johnny Schmoker," with recitative in pigeon English. Even papa was impressed into service, and had to do duty as dumb orator and Chinese interpreter, beside covering himself with glory by his original fantasia on a comb. Indeed, the best fun of all was "Schwatel's Merry Sleigh-ride." How grandma did laugh at the preparations! Penny-whistles, drums, trumpets, bird-calls, sleigh-bells, triangles, squeaking dogs, cat-calls, rattles, and, last not least, torpedoes and a tin pan for the postilion's whip. Dick assumed that responsibility to perfection. Aunt Margaret played the piano, Uncle Will, on stilts, with an immense stick of candy

for a baton, led the orchestra, sternly reproving Madame Peyton's curly, white dog when it did not squeak in time, and frowning fiercely on the comb artist for want of accuracy in his trills.

The rehearsals were great fun. It was so very jolly that mamma said it was too bad to keep it all to themselves, and the children might ask a few friends for New Year's night if the excitement would not be too much for grandma. But grandma declared it was better than all the doctors and apothecaries, to see the happy faces, and hear the merry shouts and laughter. "It's like the old, old times, when I was a girl, dear, in Kensington. We were kept strictly enough the rest of the year, but from Christmas to Twelfth-night we might do what we would, without fear of reprimand or penalty. Perhaps, too, I can recall some of our frolics for the little folks, that will be a little different from "Yankee notions."

"You dear, sweet grandma. You are next nicest to mamma, and you know she is the sweetest, sugar-plummiest mamma in the whole world."

"Take care, Ellie darling; don't smother grandma with your wild hugs; she isn't quite strong yet. Come, dears; bring your slates and pencils, put down the names of all those you would like to invite; then we will see how many we can have."

Hetty was first with her list, written out as neatly

and carefully as if it were an exhibition copy-book. But that was the way with everything Hetty did, with whom, truly, to write and sew, if not to read, came by nature.

"*Nellie Alden,*

Hattie Lawrence,

Emma Newton,—

I always begin with those three, mamma, because they always go everywhere together, and sit together at school."

"Now, Hetty, I don't think they will be nice to have, a bit," interrupted Ellie, — "for a frolic, I mean. I don't believe Nellie Alden ever went to a frolic party in all her life. She would have on a white silk, or a puffed tulle, or something that you wouldn't dare to touch, and Uncle Will *will* romp and race, I know, and he never will care for clothes, and I think Hattie and Emma are just as stiff and hateful as they can be. They always say, 'Now, run away, little girl,' and I'm only one year younger than Nellie, and we are all in the same class. They're snubby."

"Wait a minute, little girlie. Do they tell Hetty to run away?"

"No, mamma; they always want Hetty, and they never want me."

"Well, dear, can you guess why? Didn't I hear of a little mishap just before I went away?"

"Yes, I know. I upset the ink on Emma's new dress, but I didn't mean to. She ought to have filled her inkstand herself; my hand will joggle sometimes. Then it wasn't my fault, either, about Hattie's mandoline — no, bandoline. How should I know she had a bottle in her pocket? We were playing tag, Dick and I, and I just bumped her, and the old bottle broke, and made everything sticky. O, it was just funny, though, to see her and the mess it made in her pocket! There were some verses Miranda Jones had copied for her on pink paper, and some chocolate bonbons and gumdrops, and the lace pocket-handkerchief she carries to dancing-school. I guess she carried it to school without leave, for she seemed so troubled about it. Mr. Parker made her take everything out, and put all the things on his desk, while Miss Macy rinsed the pocket in cold water, and squeezed it as dry as possible before the fire. You know Mr. Parker forbids candy being brought to school, and Hattie does it all the time. She would have lost it this time, anyway, for forfeit, but it was all mushed, and stuck in with bits of glass. It was fun, too, about the mandoline. We girls never could guess, before, how she kept her hair so smooth, just like glass, and stiff as candy, even when she was running. She used to say it was 'nat-

ural to her hair to keep smooth, and she was so glad, it was so much more genteel than curls.' But we guessed what the mandoline bottle was for."

"My darling, I think we will have Nellie, and Emma, and Hattie, all the same, and indeed all the more. Nellie's mamma is one of my dear friends, and Mrs. Lawrence, too. As for poor Hattie, she has no mamma."

"'Poor Hattie!' Why, mamma, she has a hundred thousand dollars, all her own."

"Poor Hattie all the same, dear, for she has neither father nor mother, sister nor brother, and her grandmother is not the most judicious person in the world. We will write little notes, and ask all the girls to be sure and wear their old dresses and bring long-sleeved aprons, for it is to be a 'frolic party.'"

"That will fix it all right, I guess, mamma. I'll be awful good, 'specially to Hattie."

"Let me see, Hetty, what other names you have, for Ellie hasn't written one, we have been talking so fast. The Carys and the Hoopers and the Newells, and Cousin Patty and Lena, and the Kings and Birdie Flint. That's all right. Dick shall ask five of his friends, and Aunt Margaret will ask the mammas and papas for me; only every one must understand that it is a 'frolic party.'"

The sleighing was fine; and by the time the list was

fairly made out, and the notes ready, Uncle Will was at the door with the double sleigh and the brown ponies, who shook their silver bells and red rosettes as if they knew all about it.

"Here Dick, Hetty, Ellie! tumble in on the back seat. Aunt Margaret is going to teach me how to drive. Tuck in the buffalo robe, Master Dick! no tantrums, if you please. This is serious business; a solemn and momentous occasion, my *début* on the road."

"Why, Uncle Will!"

"Don't believe him, auntie; he's a regular phantom."

Ellie meant a phaeton, I suppose.

"You are not afraid, Aunt Margaret, are you? I have sailed the seas more than the land for the last five years, but next to a ship I think I understand and love a horse. It is my *début* on the Brighton road this season only. I should like to show you that I am no unskilled Jehu."

Aunt Margaret answered, with a merry laugh, "Remember you've precious freight, Master Phaeton."

A crack of the whip, a fling of the reins, a rattle of silver bells, and away they swept down the long avenue. The air was so fresh and clear, the snow so crisp and sparkling, the ponies so well up to the importance of the business on hand, that the gay party

caused many a passer-by to turn back for another look at the fair, Saxon beauty of Miss Maggie, and Uncle Will's bronzed face and black curly hair, to say nothing of the gleeful youngsters nestled in the scarlet and fur robes behind.

Of course every one accepted. Who ever was known to refuse an invitation to The Cedars? It was to be an early party; six till ten. There was plenty to do to make ready. Even Ellie and Dick, who generally knew everything, did'nt know what was going on up stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

QUEEN DINAH.

PUNCTUALLY, at six o'clock, every one arrived. Almost all the children had obeyed, literally, Mrs. Adams's request, and had come with their school-dresses and big aprons. For the few who were unprovided, mamma drew from her store any number of long-sleeved tires.

It was Ellie's private opinion that there were always nine hundred and ninety-nine high-necked, long-sleeved aprons laid away for use. At all events, she and Hetty had learned to sew making them, and all the remnants of calico that papa used to send home from the store, and all the skirts of out-grown dresses, were converted into what Dick called *overallesses*, a protection quite as necessary for Miss Ellie's clothes as for Master Dick's. Hetty wore them because Ellie did; though Hetty might have been plunged in the Slough of Despond and would have come out fresh and clean, while poor Ellie, as a matter of course, on the smallest provocation, absorbed dirt enough to reduce a New Hampshire farm to its granite foundation.

When the wrappings and the coats and the snow-boots and the leggins had all been laid aside, and the calico uniform donned, the order was given by Uncle Will, "Form into line,—one, two; mark time,—one, two; forward march,—left wheel, right face, march!" through the long hall and the dining-room, through the side entry to the kitchen.

Yes, a kitchen party.

There stood Queen Dinah, the image of good-nature, laughing and chuckling, with her hands on her hips. Her dress was gay enough for a picture; red moreen petticoat, blue and white striped linsey short gown, an immense white apron, starched till it shone and crackled, tied round her ample waist, a gorgeous painted pin, that Uncle Will had brought her from Constantinople, stuck into the double white frill round her throat, standing out so aggressively that she looked like a motherly hen, a good deal ruffled. Her ebony face, spite of its wrinkles, shone with kindness and pride. Such a turban as Dinah had erected could not have justice done to it in words. The Grand Mufti himself would grow pale with rage and envy at the mere thought of it. Yards and yards of thin flowered muslin, washed and clearstarched to the last degree of whiteness and clearness, lightly folded and dexterously wreathed round and round, higher and higher like a tower of Babel. The weight was nothing; but

QUEEN DINAH.

its aspiration, if not its actual altitude, was infinite. This turban of Dinah's was a kind of spiritual thermometer; if everything were about right, the turban was white and moderate, growing larger, and finer in quality, with her inward exaltation; if she were in a towering rage, a scarlet and yellow bandanna took the place of muslin. Woe to the child or storeboy who crossed her path when the fiery crest was upreared, especially if the two ends were tied on top like pennons! In a specially depressed state her head was covered with a handkerchief, knotted at four corners very like a nightcap. At such times "ebery ting was clean done gone; an' de worl' coming to zed zany zamper zand;" this, with "A — apple pie," constituting Dinah's alpha and omega. Then Dinah knew absolutely nothing; was utterly incapable, inefficient, ignorant of the commonest rules of cooking; everything got burned or soured; dishes and cups cracked and smashed without rhyme or reason. The natural end-up to one of these "dispensations," in about twenty-four hours, was a disappearance behind her check apron in the shadow of the big door, a hearty cry, and an emergence like the sky after a thunderstorm. Nothing was ever known to shorten the period of darkness except some other one's trouble, especially any mishap to Ellie, for whom Dinah would have roasted herself piecemeal, or, more suggestive of pain

and sacrifice to her, would have lived in "*Kram-scratchikee*, where de folks friz up jes' once, an' nebber thaw." There was no question about to-day, however, and Queen Dinah did the honors of her grand old kitchen in a way long to be remembered.

O, that kitchen! There are no such kitchens now. Dear old Cedars! It had been in the Adams family for seven generations, and seemed to have just budded and blossomed out of the great central chimney. There were new rooms and old, little rooms and big rooms, square rooms, round rooms, corner rooms, rooms with high ceilings, and rooms where the roof sloped suddenly to the floor; rooms that opened out of odd landings on the stairways, rooms that were only accessible through trap-doors in closets of other rooms, each furnished and fashioned as the taste of the generation suggested, always acquiring but never losing anything, as it passed from father to son. No wonder it was the delight of all the children far and near. Such places for hide-and-seek, such endless vistas for follow-my-leader, such chimney-corners for story-telling, such deep window-seats to curl up in and read story-books, such stores of ancient finery and triptraps in the garret! A visit to it was better than going to the Museum any day. To go from one end of the house to the other was like living at once in the nineteenth century and the seventeenth, and all the way between.

The kitchen itself was a curiosity. It must have been the original living-room of the family, say in 1630 or thereabouts, when the traditional ox-team might have driven through the fireplace, and when in good truth the student of astronomy might have sat by his own fireside and looked up at the stars. The ancient cranes and hooks still remained, the bake-kettle and fire-dogs, the glittering tin kitchen and roasting-jack. The huge brick oven at the side had not outlived its usefulness. From its wonderful mouth still came such marvels of pastry and cake as only Dinah could concoct; but it was only on great occasions that Dinah used that side of the kitchen. She had so far succumbed to modern improvements as to permit a huge cooking-stove to stand in one corner, inwardly despising its obtrusive newness, but outwardly making excellent use of its square blackness. "Jes' like de ole un; all a smooth, shiny atop, an' mighty red-hot inside, a burnin' ef yer tech it, fur all it look so innercent." But to-night the stove was cold and empty, and the big chimney was all aglow with huge hickory logs. On the crane hung a big kettle, already bubbling and seething with a sweet, enchanting smell coming up through the steam, as Dinah ever and anon stirred the cauldron with a long, wooden spoon, never intermitting for an instant either

her watchful care of the big kettle and its mysterious contents, or her dignified, cordial reception of her young guests, to each of whom she curtsied with a slow, smiling stateliness that would not have disgraced the Queen of Sheba.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FROLIC PARTY.

"WHAT did it all mean?" everybody was asking everybody else. But nobody knew, or, if they knew, they didn't tell.

Ellie's quick eyes spied under the table the basket, whose contents they had failed to guess the night of grandma's arrival, and which had been carried off in triumph to her room; but even she was none the wiser.

"Come, Mass' Dick, count de girls an' de boys; all tole, how many?"

"Twenty, Aunt Dinah."

"Set de twenty soup-plates dat's in de pile roun' de big table, wid a fork an' a spoon apiece; den you big boys go fotch in snow ter fill 'em all."

In silent amazement, relieving his feelings by a low whistle only, Dick, with Jack Crosman and Ben Sharford, obeyed the last part of the order, while Hetty and Ellie set the table. How the little guests stared! There was fun, of course, somewhere. But what a funny supper! a plate of snow and a spoon and fork to eat it with! Well, they would wait and see.

"All right, Dinah. Supper's ready. I say, our soup won't burn our mouths?"

"I guess it's snow pudding, and Dinah's cooking the sauce."

"Don't need no sass where you ar', Mass' Dick, for sure. Did you nebber hear of a 'sug'n off.'"

"No, no, no!" from a chorus of voices.

"Well, den, dis am a sug'n off, unner fav'ble auspishes; dis in de kittle am de sugar, an' when yer done eatin' it you'll be off, sure 'nuff. T'he, t'he, t'he!"

By this time Dinah had dexterously turned the contents of the big kettle into a huge tureen, placed it in the middle of the table and was rapidly ladling out to each child a goodly portion, pouring it directly on to the mountain of snow in each plate. Aunt Margaret and Uncle Will had joined them, and little instruction was needed to introduce them to their new experience of *maple wax*, as it is technically called. The little rills of hot syrup trickling through the snow were in just the right state for eating, requiring only a judicious twist of the fork to gather a ball of delicious, amber sweetness, unknown to those whose only acquaintance is with sugar-cake.

Dick, who was just into mythology, made a characteristic speech, exalting and glorifying the Yankee notion as one more proof of the superiority of this Western world. "Talk of nectar and ambrosia, of

ambrita, indeed! There must be maple groves in Olympus, or the gods are defrauded."

Before they were tired of their new sweetmeat, there was corn to pop, and candy to pull, and corn balls to make. Such golden ropes of candy as Uncle Will and Aunt Margaret twisted! Such snowy piles, light as cotton wool, as Dinah poured from the long-handled popper! Then there were cakes of maple sugar to pound for those who liked to eat it with corn and milk. Never was a merrier hour passed, without any mishap more serious than soap and water would cure.

By half-past seven, the golden sticks, the funny quirks and quirls, the drops and the corn-balls, were ready to set in the snow to cool. At the sound of a bell, basins of water and ample towels were put in requisition, and the big aprons cast aside, preparatory to a return march to the front parlor, where the papas and mammas, having finished their quieter tea, were awaiting the children and the Kinder Sinfonie. Dick had printed the programmes on his funny little printing-press, in a style that promised well for the young Franklin. Here it is: —

A MERRY SLEIGHING-PARTY.

Allegro.—The departure, with accompaniment of whips and sleigh-bells.

ARRIVAL AT THE INN.

Larghetto.—Preparations for dancing, introducing a comb duet.

Allegretto.—Waltz and polka, with accompaniment of castanets, champagne-corks, clinking of glasses, etc.

Allegro.—Trumpet signal for returning. Homeward ride. Good-night at the door.

It was a grand success. The house shook with applause, or would, if it had not been built with old-fashioned firmness. The distinguished solo artists were called out repeatedly, and Dick sent off all the rest of the torpedoes at once, in acknowledgment of the proud honor. Grandpa, if he couldn't see, could hear as well as any of them, and enjoyed it as heartily as the children, declaring if he only had his feet in an ice-pail he should know he was taking a real sleigh-ride. Mr. Alden insisted it was worth a dozen Germania concerts, while the shouts and hearty laughter of the children were like the chorus in a Greek play, filling in all the gaps. Then followed every sort of old-fashioned game. No one was too old or too wise to join in the frolic party. Mr. Alden burnt his fingers at snap-dragon. Mr. Newton's grave face and long black beard looked prematurely gray, when he emerged from the search for sixpence in a flour-bed. They roasted nuts in pairs and singly; and Aunt Margaret blushed, and Uncle Will looked mischievous and

happy, when his nut and hers, from opposite sides of the fireplace, went up chimney together with a snap and a pop.

Presently Dinah came in with an immense tin dish, piled up smooth like a great pie. "Come by 'spress for yer suppers; one ob dem new Jummum puddins, wid plums fur every body. Mass' Will, here's de spoon an' de fork ter help wid." With this she placed the big dish on the table that Hetty's deft fingers had hastily cleared, and handed Uncle Will a huge fork and wooden spoon.

How they all looked and wondered! At last Madame Peyton spoke, "What is this, my daughter? Is it one of Dinah's queer freaks?"

"No, mother, it is one of Will's German fancies. You know his ship sails to-morrow, and this frolic party has been his good-bye to the children as much as anything."

Grandma was silent and sad enough for a moment or two; for in the gayety and happy bustle, she had almost forgotten how soon her dear boy was to leave her again, for the last time, he and she truly hoped. As if a true sailor born could ever say a final good-by to the sea! But she would not let her sorrowful thoughts cast a shadow on the happiness of others, so she was the first to insist on a spoonful of "Jummum pudding." It was well she did, for every one, anxious

for a taste of the famous pudding, seemed equally anxious that some one else should ask first.

The "Jummum" proved to be of bran; concealed in which were countless parcels that came to light with each dip of the spoon or plunge of the fork. Something for every one; things useful and things ridiculous; odd German toys, baked potatoes full of sugar-plums, mutton chops filled with chocolate creams, tomatoes that were needle-cases, plums that held thimbles, innocent-looking apples that turned into jumping-jacks. Aunt Margaret had an English walnut, and in it a tiny gold key; all by chance, of course. Every one was helped at last but Uncle Will.

"Dear me, I've been left out! I ought to have helped myself first."

"Poor carver, Mr. Peyton, who doesn't look out for himself," said Mr. Alden. "Isn't there a single morsel left for you?"

"Come, Miss Margaret, it's only fair that the fairest should help the helper. Come, put your own white hand into the very bottom."

A moment's search brought out a little square parcel hardly two inches long.

"Last and least, Mr. Peyton."

"Perhaps not. Let us see. Come, Miss Margaret, will you untie the knot?"

A small, polished ebony box came to light; but, alas, securely locked. Every body tried their keys in vain; but either the box was only to be opened with a magic word, or Will must wait for some fortunate finding of a key smaller than any that had yet appeared.

The fun meanwhile waxed loud and wild, — "Puss in the corner," "Follow my leader," "Blindman's buff," "Johnny Schmoker." What kept the old house from tumbling about their ears, no one knew.

The tide of mirth and frolic had swept quite away from the deep alcove whence Uncle Will had dispensed his bran pudding, and where he was resting for a moment. Aunt Margaret left the merry troop who were in the midst of "Fox and Geese."

"Mr. Peyton, I have found a tiny key in my English walnut. I hardly know what induced me to break it, but this little gold key, on a blue ribbon, is all that I find in it."

"Then it is you who are to unlock my box. Supposing there is a treasure in it, shall we share it?"

"Certainly."

"On the whole, I prefer the property entire. You shall open the box and give me what you see in it."

"Agreed."

The key fits marvellously. The lid is raised. Ah, Miss Margaret, your sweet, rosy face is rosier still as,

after one glimpse, you hastily close the little box and place it shyly in Uncle Will's hand!

"Is it mine, Margaret?"

The big, brown eyes tried in vain to meet the soft blue ones, quite hidden by the drooping lids; but he listened and heard such a gentle '*yes*.' No one but Uncle Will could have heard it.

"It is my turn now," he said.

Once more the box opened; but some secret spring, which only Uncle Will knew, raised the little mirror-lid beneath the cover, and there, on a velvet cushion, lay a pearl ring. It was only an exchange. Aunt Margaret wore the ring, and Uncle Will knew the sweet face that looked out of the little mirror, when Aunt Margaret opened the box, was to be his when he came home from the seas again. To each their pearl.

The sound of the chase drew near. The fox was making his second round uncaught; as the geese flew pell-mell through the parlor, Aunt Margaret joined them, while Uncle Will, as hunter, chased the fox. Round and round, faster and faster, until Uncle Will stopped suddenly and wheeled around. The whole chase, the geese and the fox continuing their course, ran, one after another, directly into his arms. It was a trap, sure enough; but as he caught them he kissed them good-night and good-by together. His ship

was to sail with the early tide, and there was need of a little quiet talk.

So the frolic party was over, with something for all the children to talk over at recess for many a day. There certainly was not another party like it all winter, and perhaps never will be again, but it came to be a byword to express something superlative, "O, as nice as the Adams' frolic party."

Even Aunt Margaret, though she cried a little with the rest when Uncle Will drove down the avenue at daylight, looked prettier and sweeter and happier than ever. It could not have been because she wore a pearl ring that Ellie had never seen before? It must, I think, have been be of something of which the ring was a symb n.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE END OF THE HOLIDAYS.

It was pretty hard to settle down to every-day life after the holidays were over, and Uncle Will, the life and brightness of the house, was fairly gone; but, if

> "All work and no play
> Make Jack a dull boy,
> All play and no work
> Doesn't give much more joy."

In fact before Twelfth-night the girls began to count the days till school would begin; even Dick agreed that somehow "Saturday afternoon got more fun crowded into it, or, at all events, it relished better than when a fellow had all day and every day."

It's a good sign when children are glad to leave off study for play, and equally eager to quit play for study when the time comes. Really I don't know myself which is best fun, but I reckon that boy or girl lacks something of childhood's keen enjoyment, who does not just a little prefer looking forward to holidays. I did, so I guess Hetty and Ellie and Dick did, too; but this fact does not make it any the less true that after two weeks, crammed full of fun and merriment, they

were both glad and willing to look forward to work again, and Monday morning.

Sunday had been pretty quiet, with the usual gathering in mamma's room for Sunday stories and Sunday pictures, with papa to explain the hard bits, and talk about the places he had himself visited. Grandma had been unusually silent, but brightened visibly and joined in the singing, when papa started the dear old hymn, —

"There is a green hill far away."

Then Dick's favorite came, —

"We're out on the ocean sailing,
Homeward bound we quickly glide."

But Aunt Margaret's sweet contralto failed just then, and only Dick and Ellie and Hetty reached the end.

There was perfect stillness for a little while; then mamma began the old Latin hymn, *Adeste fideles*, which had sung the little ones to sleep so often, and given rest and strength to so many children of a larger growth; but this time she sang it to the familiar paraphrase of the twenty-third psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd." One after another joined in, till the grand harmony of the glorious chorale filled the room and the house, cheering every heart that sung or listened. Old Dinah heard it and was glad.

Madame Peyton laid her hand tenderly on the hand

of her blind husband, and said softly, "I know he is safe. I can trust the Good Shepherd to bring my boy home again."

After that there were only good-nights said. One by one, kissing grandma and grandpa, papa and mamma and Aunt Margaret, who seemed gentler and more tender than ever, the little folks crept softly away to quiet sleep and pleasant dreams.

Books and slates, satchels and straps, had all been in readiness Saturday night, so there was no special call for early rising, even if school did begin Monday. But the cold gray of the morning had hardly given place to the reluctant dawn, when Dick's voice was heard in the hall, whistling "The Harmonious Blacksmith," while he made an anvil of the great sheet-iron drum which heated the big upper hall, using his fists for hammers in capital "Anvil Chorus" time, if he had ever heard that much-belabored piece of music.

"What *is* the matter, Dick," shouted Ellie, roused at last. "Is the house on fire?"

"No, little mother; but, don't you see, Dinah said I mustn't call you, so I thought I'd wake you to sweet music's charmed sound. I thought it would fetch. Its frozen prime; there's a crust on Honeysuckle Hill would bear an ox-cart. Let's have a coast before breakfast, — last chance this season; there will always be lessons to look over, mornings, after to-day."

"Good, good! I won't be a moment dressing. Hetty, wake up. Don't you want a coast? Dick says it's prime."

But Hetty only answered, sleepily, "Ye-e-e-s. Is it school-time?"

"Dear, no! It isn't seven o'clock yet, but we can coast an hour before breakfast, if you make haste."

Before the long sentence was through, Hetty was asleep again, and Ellie half dressed.

"Come, Hetty, don't you want to coast?"

"No. I guess I'd rather sleep."

"All aboard! all aboard!" shouted Dick. "Lightning express train; only five minutes for refreshments. Come along, Ellie; don't bother about Hetty, let her sleep, if she wants to. I'll ask Dinah to get the hot milk."

"All right; get some brown crusts for me. I don't want crackers. Tell Dinah to hurry up, or we shall lose our fun."

Off went Dick, three stairs at a time, while Ellie tugged away at her rebellious curls, heartily wishing they were cropped short, like her envied brother's. I am quite sure she did not give them Miss Martineau's recommended hundred strokes with a stiff brush. A dip in the basin, a twist with a coarse comb, a few dabs with a towel, to dry off a little of the superfluous water, that had a fashion of running off the end of

each heavy curl, like a leaky spout, and Ellie's task was done. Dame Nature did the rest, fortunately for Miss Ellie, who, so far, had developed no instinctive appreciation of the toilet's mysteries.

For a wonder, everything was in its place, and no hunt was needed for hood and coat, which, of course, were tied and buttoned on the way to the kitchen.

It was one of Mrs. Adams's rules that the children should never go out into the cold, before breakfast, without first drinking a bowl of hot milk, with a cracker or bread-crust; a wise precaution, which, with their thick wraps, made it easy to defy old Boreas himself, and never seemed to lessen their appreciation of breakfast, when it came, either.

Nothing was a trouble to Dinah that comforted the "chilluns." By the time Ellie made her appearance with hood and leggins, fur-trimmed Russia robe pelisse, with scarlet mittens dangling from each wrist, the silver porringers were filled with steaming milk ready for the early birds.

"Thank you, Dinah, a crust for me, please!"

"Crackers for me, Dinah; I wonder why I like crackers best? Do you know, Ellie?"

"I guess it's because they crunch when you eat them, isn't it?"

"Shouldn't wonder. Then, too, you know, castaways and folks lost in the woods always have a few

crackers in their pockets. Robinson Crusoe himself, you know, was specially delighted to find a bag of 'em, and Swiss Family Robinson found no end of enjoyment eating them with Dutch salt butter."

"Hot milk's better, though. I'm through, Dick, aren't you?"

"One moment, —

'The last drop's in the cup,
I'm gasping at the brink;
Your health, my sister dear,
In that drop I must drink.'

Good-by, Dinah. Thanks for the hot drops."

"O Dick!" screamed Ellie, with delight, as she opened the storm-door, "are you going to take the double-runner?"

"Yes, I thought when I rigged up that Hetty would go too. It's lots jollier, anyway. Bundle on, little mother; put up your feet. Got your snow-boots? All right; tuck in your pelisse, hold on tight.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!
Off we go,
Over the ice,
Over the snow.
Whing whang,
Slam bang!
This horse never slips,
This horse never trips.

Jingglety gee,
Jolly are we;
If you don't look about
You'll tumble right out.
Off you go
Into the snow!

I say, Ellie, did I hurt you?"

"Not a bit. Just knock the snow off my hood; it gets down my neck if it melts. It was just fun."

"I say, Ellie, you are a tip-top sister; some of the girls I know would be mad to get such a bouncing."

"How silly when it was all fun! Did you do it on purpose, Dick?"

"How can you go for to cast such aspersions on your charioteer?"

"H'm, I thought I was the charioteer, only I haven't any reins."

"No, you are only passenger. That was the contract. I guess I've got my reins, though, somewhere in one of these forty-eleven pockets."

What doesn't a boy's pocket hold? The reins were forthcoming, with tiny jingling bells that made merry music with the large ones, on the belt which Dick had donned at starting. He was a comfortable sort of a pony, for he could harness himself and was soon caparisoned. This pony, too, possessed the additional accomplishment of gathering the gay reins, and placing

them in his driver's hands. There was no whip, so Ellie contented herself with a lapful of snowballs, which, with accurate aim, she shied at her steed, when he seemed more inclined to frisk and prance than proceed.

CHAPTER IX.

HONEYSUCKLE HILL.

TEN minutes brought the merry pair to the foot of Honeysuckle Hill, a favorite resort in all weathers; in summer full of nooks and hollows, where the first violets and anemones were to be found; a famous place for checkerberries, and, in one tangled corner, for blackberries that fairly rivalled the now famous Lawtons. Two or three great nut-trees at the top of the hill made pleasant summer shade, but now their bare branches stood out in relief against the brilliant sky like black etchings. The whole hill wore a very different aspect in January from that of June or October, especially after such a storm. The snow had filled in every inequality, obliterating all landmarks except the great trees; the only hint of fences being in one or two faint ridges, suggestive of lovely jounces. Like one unbroken, glittering white dome, and almost as steep to climb up, it stood in the dazzling morning light. A flurry of fine hail and rain, after the snow, had made the crust as smooth and shiny as a steel cuirass. The heavy double-runner did not make a dent even, as the frisky steed and no less

frisky rider accomplished a third of the ascent from the mere impetus of starting. Ellie was too generous, however, to let Dick tug all the way up with her, though he fully meant to. Off she jumped, and, slipping into the harness without stopping the team, joined in Dick's extempore chorus, —

"Hip, hip, hurrah!
Off we go,
Over the ice,
Over the snow.
Whing whang,
Slam bang!"

They were soon at the top. Dick wheeled into place, like the gallant fellow that he always was, made sure that Ellie was comfortable and secure on the cushions, then took his own seat in front, planting his feet securely on the cross-bars for steering, gathered the rope firmly in each hand, bade Ellie hold on to him tight, clasping her arms round his waist, with the stout, leather belt to cling to for security.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!
Off we go,
Over the ice,
Over the snow.
Whing whang,
Slam bang!"

It fairly takes one's breath away to think of it.

With a whirr and a rush and a jangling of bells, and the curious *stz* that steel runners make on uncut icy crust with the mercury not far from zero, off they go indeed.

The keen air whistled as they swept through it, Ellie's frozen curls and scarlet tippet streaming behind like banners, her rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes eloquent of fun and exhilaration. Dick had a steady hand; no fear of the old apple-stump on the right, or the big boulder on the left. True as an arrow the gay team sped down the steep hill, over the "jounce," which in summer was a low stile in the stone boundary-wall, now drifted smooth and round, across the road, down, down, to the very pond itself. This was an unusual achievement, only possible when the road was unbroken and the crust in bearing condition. An hour later the ox-teams would have broken it in, and the limit would have been just over the jounce. It would be something to boast of for the rest of the winter.

"Wasn't that tip-top, Ellie?"

"The best, the very best, coast I ever had in all my life. I don't believe we were one minute coming down. O, dear, if it did not take so long to walk up! How many times can we coast before breakfast, Dick?"

"Let's see; ten minutes up, one minute down, one

for breathing before we start up, and two to get ready before we start down, and one for tare and tret, that's fifteen; four times, Ellie, and get in when the bell rings."

"Good! now for the up grade."

Three times the lightning express took the same route with the same success. Ellie began to be a little anxious about breakfast, spite of the fun, for papa was the soul of punctuality; but she toiled bravely up, side by side with Dick, to the old chestnut-tree once more.

"I say, Dick, let's be explorators."

"All right: what shall we explorate?"

"You always catch me up so, Dick Adams! I mean people who go on explorations."

"Explorers, oh! Well, what's up now, little mother?"

"Don't you think it would be nice to ride all the way home instead of walking round?"

> "Sartain, mum; for sure
> These thrimblin' lim's will scarcely
> Bear me to the door.

An' how is it, me darlin', ye'll convey me there?"

"Let's go down the other side of the hill."

"Jeru — there, now, I did not say it, Ellie, I promised Aunt Mag I wouldn't. But aren't you a bit crazy this morning? It's high as Bunker Hill mon-

ument, and twice as steep, that side. If mamma's looking out of the window, she'll think we are killing ourselves."

"No, she won't. It would be such fun; we'll tell her about it afterwards."

"It would be fun, that's so. If I can hit it right, we shall come straight in under the dining-room windows. Here goes, Ellie; don't let go, whatever happens."

"O, I'll hold on fast enough."

A crazy feat it was to attempt; no one but Ellie would have dreamed of it. It was rough climbing in summer, at the best; no one ever thought of such a thing as trying to go up or down in winter. There were so many little ledges where the ground fell off abruptly, that it was fairly precipitous; besides, the path, such as it was, led nowhere except to the back of Mr. Adams's garden. But there was a curious element in Ellie's nature, which, indeed, she shared with Dick, best described in Scott's words, —

> "If the spot be dangerous known,
> Why, danger's self is lure alone."

Without any second thoughts, down the perilous descent the two scapegraces went, at a speed absolutely frightful. There was no possibility of controlling the double-runner after the first ten rods; no

possibility of stopping if they had desired to; the only chance was to hold on, and, if possible, keep her "head to."

If, in the moment of drowning, one's life flashes before him in an instant, certainly, in the moment of this fearful rush and plunge, everything and everybody flashed through Ellie's brain, while Dick had time to blame himself for yielding to the wild impulse, as, in a hasty glance, his mother's agonized face at the window photographed itself on his sight. He had need of all his strength and courage, all his boasted steadiness of hand and eye. If the front sled swerved a hair's-breadth they would come broadside foremost, and one or the other, perhaps both, be killed before their mother's very eyes. I wonder, in all moments of danger, in the great crises of life, if every second seems lengthened to hours as were those terrible seconds. Dick's face was as colorless as the snow over which they were flying. Ellie was silent, scarce daring to breathe, lest the vibration should make them swerve from the only possible line of safety, for at the same instant a new terror revealed itself to both. Some large granite posts for the new gateway had been carted from the quarry only the week before, and stood on either side of the road they must cross before they could reach the desired haven. The space seemed incredibly small that was left; the chance of get-

ting through the narrow opening so small that safety seemed a miracle. For one instant an utter hopelessness crept over poor Dick as he thought, "It's no use trying. God must help us, — if He can." In that instant there came to him, from far away it seemed, but distinct as an angel's trump, the old soldier's cry to his men, "Trust God, and keep your powder dry!"

"I will," he murmured.

The stout rope, that was loosening in his hands, was firmly grasped, not in distrust of God's help, but with the sense of infinite power which comes to any boy or girl on whom flashes the conviction, born oftenest in crises of danger and trouble, "God and I."

"He will do His part: mine is to do the best I know how, and steer for the opening."

Nearer and nearer those pillars of Hercules reared themselves, as though the sled stood still and they were advancing. Nearer and nearer. The windows were filled with eager, horror-stricken faces; Dinah stood in the doorway wringing her hands in trembling expectation of that which no one could avert; but Dick saw only the narrow opening.

In less time than it has taken to write it, it was all over; the dangerous pass was won. By a strange anti-climax, such as sometimes seems providentially sent to relax the overstrained nervous system, those who had been the objects of anxious fears became in an

HONEYSUCKLE HILL.

instant the subjects of inextinguishable mirth. Just inside the low cellar-door was the soft-coal bin, with the accumulated fine dust and débris of the year. After passing the stone posts, Dick's tight grasp had relaxed a little. The sled slewed as it came into the yard with abated speed, but, with the air of a conscious joker, the fine team plunged into the cellar-way, landing our "explorators" unceremoniously in the coal-bin. It was a relief to Dinah to have a chance to pick the youngsters up out of their soft, black bed, and, between crying, scolding, and laughing, to shake them both heartily.

"O yer rampastious critters! what do yer mean by mussin' up my coal-bin? 'Pears like ye might ha, gone in toder door like gen'l folks. Look at yer new p'lisse, Miss Ellie; and your pooty red mitt'ns bracker'n my han's! Bress yer ole Dinah's darlin', what ye mean ter do, killin' yersel' 'fore breakfast, and makin' a muss? Mass' Dick, 'clare for' t, yer mos' scar' de ole brack hen off de nest! Sha'nt get no eggs dis rate. Come 'long, and clean yersel', yer a sight fur wite folks chilluns!"

By this time dear old Dinah had the darling young sinners in the big kitchen, and half the traces of the late collision removed; but the children were still pale from excitement, and went in soberly enough with papa, who, in his most serious tone, told them

that dear mamma had fainted as soon as she saw the danger past, and was now lying on the lounge in the dining-room.

"You may come in softly, that she may see you are really safe. I need not, I am sure, forbid your repeating this morning's experience, Master Dick?"

"Never, never, dear papa. I have had a lesson for a lifetime."

"It was my fault, papa," whispered penitent Ellie. "I coaxed him."

"We will say no more now, my children. God has been very good to us all to-day."

The children stole softly up to mamma, as she lay so white and still on the sofa, with self-reproaches far more poignant than any words. Dick kissed his mother, with a caressing touch of his rough, boy hand on her soft brown hair, that said volumes to her mother heart, even without the murmured words, and the hot tears that Ellie found on mamma's face when she laid her cheek repentantly beside her dear, darling mammy's on the pillow.

"Dick mustn't scold himself; it was I, mammy dear."

But the words that Dick had whispered were not of blame for himself, far less for Ellie. To mamma it was worth even that morning's terrible experience to hear them, —

"I know it now, mamma; the Presence of God."

The revelation was as a lightning flash to Dick, young as he was. He never did forget it, though it was many a year before any one but God and his mother shared the knowledge.

CHAPTER X.

BETSEY.

CHILDREN recover easily from even so terrible a fright as Ellie's and Dick's, but mamma did not rally so quickly; perhaps because she realized, as they could not, the nearness of the black desolation, which, as it were, had passed by on the other side. It was a week or more before Mrs. Adams resumed her place in the household. Meantime Ellie was indefatigable in her attendance, and Dick so far controlled himself, young tornado that he was, that not a heavy footfall, nor so much as a loud halloo, jarred on the poor sufferer. A week's repose and stillness, however, worked wonders. Once or twice, already, mamma had told stories of long ago to Ellie, when, awaking from sweet sleep, she felt inclined to reward her little nurse for her patient, quiet watch. It was after such an awaking that Hetty and Ellie had the good fortune to hear the story of Betsey.

In Ellie's eyes, mamma was not only the loveliest of mammas, but the most beautiful woman in the world, surpassing the Princess Badoura herself. Daily she discovered new charms to praise, and privately

had written sonnets (that it must be confessed limped a little) to her Lovely Mamma's Lovelier Hair, her eyes, and even her eyebrows. This time, however, mamma's really beautiful hands had attracted her. She could scarcely wait for mamma's eyes to open before she exclaimed, "What pretty hands you have, mamma! They are just like baby May's, so white and soft, and ever so many dimples! I guess mine are most as big. Dear, sweet hands, how I love you!"

Ellie buried her curly head in mamma's lap, cosseted and petted the pretty, soft hands, pushed back the loose muslin sleeves, so that she could kiss and caress the white arms too; for Ellie is an impulsive, warm-hearted little girlie, and loves her mamma in a wild, adoring way.

"O mamma darling! what are those long white lines, three of them, straight as a ruler from your elbow down to your wrist? I never saw them before. What are they? How did they come there?"

"Did you never see them before? That is because you never happened to have a love-fit for that particular arm before. That is Betsey's mark."

"Did Betsey scratch you, you dear, darling mamma? I should like to kill her. Bad, naughty, wicked Betsey!"

"No, good, darling Betsey! Whenever I look at those three little white ridges, I want to take Betsey

right in my arms and hug and kiss her, for they tell me plainer than words how little Betsey saved your life, if not mine, darling, when you were a wee baby."

"O, mamma, please tell me about it. Come, Hetty, mamma is going to tell us a story. Bring Betsey, too. I guess she would like to hear, for it is something good about her. I always think, mamma, that Betsey understands all we say to her just as much as if she could talk herself."

"Yes, dear, I think she does. You will think so, I am sure, when you hear her history."

Hetty made her appearance with Betsey in her arms. Betsey was a huge maltese cat, with fur as soft as silk. The purest gray throughout, except the very tip of her tail and four snowy stockings, of which she was very proud, and to which she devoted all her spare time. Her eyes were beautiful; not yellow or green, but deep amber with immense pupils. She always looked you straight in the face when you spoke to her, too, which is more civil than some boys and girls I know.

The big mother-chair was wheeled round to the fire; Ellie put a footstool for mamma's feet, and both the little girls clambered up into the great old-fashioned chair, whose cushioned sides towered far above their heads. There was plenty of room for mamma in the middle, Hetty and Ellie on either side,

and Betsey cuddled down in mamma's lap, looking as wise and important as if she already knew herself to be the heroine of a story.

"First, dears, I am going to tell you how I came to have Betsey at all. It was a great many years ago, before my dear Hetty and Ellie were born. Papa was not able to leave home that summer, and so, though it was very hot and I was not very strong, I would not go away either; but when papa could spare a day we used to drive down to the beach, or out into the woods, and have a holiday together. One Saturday we thought we would go a little farther than usual, and stay over Sunday at Forest Beach, about eighteen miles from our home. It was a lovely place, and the ride was charming; and we expected to enjoy our quiet Sunday at the beach out on the rocks, watching the white, curling waves, and taking in health and strength with the sea breeze. But Sunday morning brought a heavy easterly storm that was dreary enough. Papa bundled up and went out on the rocks; I insisted upon it, though I dared not go myself. He did not like to leave me, for there were no ladies in the house, — it was a kind of fishing-house rather than a hotel, — but I said I meant to make friends with the fisherman's wife and her gray cat. Surely that would be company enough for any woman.

"The fisherman's wife was not very interesting,

but Betsey was. I fell in love with her at first sight, and, as events proved, so did she with me. I petted her, and cuddled her, and talked to her; told her I wished she would come home with me and live. She should have chicken and cream, and catch mice only when she wanted, too.

"I couldn't begin to tell you half the nonsense I talked to that cat. I wasn't so very old, you see, though I was married. My boy Dick had been left at home, and, to tell the truth, I was very homesick before papa got back, and needed all the comfort I could get out of Betsey.

"When we left Forest Beach, Monday morning, we tried to persuade the fisherman and his wife to let us have Betsey to take home. I had taken such a fancy to her that papa was willing to pay the price of a dozen cats for her. But they wouldn't part with her, she was 'sich a mouser;' and then, 'She'd kinder pine, ye know, 'mong strangers.'

"It was no use coaxing, and we drove away, reluctantly enough on my part. I almost wished I was a little girl and dared to cry, I had so set my heart on having Betsey. It was a sort of comfort to fancy that Betsey was disappointed too, for she stood on the doorstep watching us wistfully as long as we were in sight."

"Do you think it was the chickens and cream, mamma?"

"I don't know, dear, but the curious part is to come, and then the beautiful part.

"The storm was not fairly done with, though the weather had partly cleared, so we were able to drive home in our open buggy without inconvenience. Before night, however, it set in for a drenching, pelting storm that lasted three days and nights. Thursday night (I can remember it as well as if it were yesterday) papa had made a little wood-fire in the study, and we were having a cosey cup of tea there instead of in the dining-room, thankful enough to be safe from the driving wind and rain. The curtain was up at the window, and the firelight streamed out cheerily for a ray of comfort to any benighted traveller. Presently I thought I heard a little noise at the window. Papa thought it was my fancy, but I was sure I heard a faint tapping or scratching. I raised the window quickly, thinking some frightened bird might have fluttered there in the storm. Something wet and dark jumped in. I could not tell what it was at first. Papa said it was a cat, and a drowned cat at that.

"'Perhaps it was Betsey,' I said, laughing. 'I wish it was. Poor, dear Betsey!'

"With that the dripping, forlorn creature looked up at me, and uttered the most piteous *mieow* I ever heard. It seems almost incredible, but, when the poor

thing was dried and cleaned enough for recognition, there was no mistake about it. She was Betsey, sure enough, and had come eighteen miles for her chicken and cream. Whether she followed us that day, and had been hiding ever since, I don't know. She seemed half starved, and made quick work with her saucer of warm cream and chicken bone. Then she sat down before the fire and made her toilet, quite as much at home as if she had been born and brought up there.

"You could not coax her away from the house on any terms; she was never happy out of my sight. Papa sent some money to the fisherman's wife, who seemed contented as long as the cat was."

"That's the curious chapter, mamma dear; now tell us the beautiful one, though I can't imagine how it can possibly be beautiful to be scratched, can you, Hetty?"

"You shall decide for yourselves; but I am quite sure you will hug and squeeze dear Betsey, and kiss the very white paw that did it, when you hear the whole.

"It was the next winter after Betsey's unexpected appearance. I had my hands full all the time, for, proud as I am of my twin girlies, it was no easy task to take care of you when you were babies; one or the other was always in my arms, and I used to get so

tired that I was glad to catch a nap when I could. You were about two months old. Ellie had gone to sleep first, and lay in the little basket by the fire. I sat in the rocking-chair with Hetty, who was uneasy. Betsey was in her usual place on the other side of the fire, watching the dancing flames and the bright sparks. I was so tired that I rocked Hetty and myself both to sleep, and must have been very sound asleep, when a sharp, severe pain, like tearing the flesh from my left arm, roused me. With a scream I started to my feet. The muslin trimming of the bassinet was in a light blaze, from a stray spark, I suppose. You, Ellie, were so wrapt up in your little woollen blanket, that the flame had not reached you. I snatched you up hastily enough, and with a pitcher of water extinguished the blazing drapery. A moment more would have been too late. When all was safe, the intolerable pain in my arm and the dripping blood called my attention to poor Betsey, who was scorched herself, evidently having tried to extinguish the spark, or pull down the curtain. Failing in that, she took the only way she knew to rouse me effectually. You may be sure I praised her and hugged her, and took care of her burnt paw, and gave her all the chicken and cream she wanted."

"Dear, darling Betsey! I should think you would love her. I must kiss each of her paws and her dear

little white nose, too. We never will tease her any more, Hetty, will we? To think of your saving my life and I never to know it, you dear, darling old Betsey! You shall have a new blue ribbon this very day, and go to ride in Blondine's carriage."

CHAPTER XI.

RENO.

FEBRUARY wore slowly away; a month of storms at best, and this year with a great deal of very disagreeable weather thrown in, which by good rights belonged to the January thaw. Even St. Valentine's day and Washington's birthday were meagre oases in the blank dreariness of the month, partly because there was no Uncle Will to make fun and nonsense, partly because, in spite of each week's hopeful prediction, mamma's face was still pale, and the children were more apt to find her on the lounge in her room than down-stairs, when they pushed eagerly in from school.

Grandma, too, was restless and impatient for Kadesh. March had come in with a cold snap, the sleighing was good, — an important item in country travelling in long ago, — and it was time to start, if they did not wish to risk spring freshets, gullied roads, and vanished bridges. So the day was set for their departure: and papa and mamma, Madame Peyton and Aunt Margaret, warmly tucked into the gayly robed sleigh, had gone to bid good-by to a few old friends.

The "children," — who were always Hetty, Ellie, and Dick, in distinction from the "little ones," Harry, Fred, and baby May, separated from the elder triad by a gap, of several years, and living still a nursery life which removed them an immeasurable distance from the school-children, — the children were in the library studying, or professing to study, their lessons for the morning. The fire snapped and crackled cheerily enough, but it was growing dark so far away from the window, and Patsey had not brought in the "astral."

"Good stretching-time," said Dick, as he made a pillow of his Latin lexicon, and measured his length on the soft Turkey rug before the fire.

Hetty and Ellie cuddled down on the floor too. "It's ever so much nicer to sit on the floor instead of in chairs before a fire. I wonder why?"

"O, bother, I don't know unless it's because it's like camping out. I say, girls, see if I can say my Virgil, the scanning does trip a fellow up so."

But Dick had scarcely begun to spout his newly acquired lore when the click of the garden-gate penetrated even through "Arma virumque cano," and Dick was on his feet at the window in an instant. "I say, Ellie, what new crinkum-crankum is up now? I thought you and Hetty were all sewed up with clothes enough for a voyage round the world; and here's Reno. Jeruoos'lum twittets! I haven't gone

through all my trousers legs, my coat doesn't want new binding, it's neither Easter nor Michaelmas, and here is Reno as big as life and a postscript."

"Where, Dick, where? Truly?"

"You don't say so! Hetty, quick, look and see!"

"Yes, it is really Reno, with her patched umbrella and a bigger bundle than ever."

"Dick, run down quick and help her. The poor old body can hardly keep on her feet, it is so slippery where we coasted down the avenue last night."

"O, Het, I can't; look at my Euclid and my Virgil. Let her slide; she'll come down aisy, like a feather bed, with her bundle for a pillow and the steeple-topped umbrella for a sign-board, a sort of *hic jacet*."

"Now, Dick, you know you never would forgive yourself if she did fall down, for it's all our fault for coasting in the path, and yours, too, for not putting the ashes on as papa told you —"

But before wise Hetty had finished her prologue she heard the front door slam, and Dick was spinning down the path like a young locomotive, with his "Hi, there, look out for the engine when the bell rings!"

The old lady braced herself for the coming shock; but Dick swerved aside at the right moment, made a profound salaam, and, before the object of his attention could remonstrate, had her big blue check bundle at the crooked end of the funny umbrella slung

over his shoulder, while he offered his free arm to the good dame with the air of a young Sidney.

"Youthful Impetuosity begs the honor of escorting Wit and Wisdom to the House Beautiful."

"Hech, you young rogue! At your wheedlin' already? It's the bonny face you have, an' aye the guid heart within, if you do love your joke on puir auld Reno."

Slowly and gently the young lad and the "old lady," as she was oftenest called, toiled up the long, winding path; for at best her steps were feeble, and she was not only weary, but so muffled and bundled that it seemed a wonder how she moved at all. Dear old Reno! I wish I could draw her picture as it stands before me. A little woman, measured vertically, a big woman, viewed horizontally, with a genius for hoarding old clothes, and in her journeys from place to place carrying the greater part of her wardrobe upon her person, stuffed into multitudinous pockets and bags hung about her, with a big remainder which was always tied up in a huge blue and white bundle handkerchief. She despised valises, carpet-bags, and trunks.

Her story had been a romance and a tragedy in one; but it was hard to realize that she had ever been young, beautiful, and a model of taste, elegance, and fashion.

It was not so much present poverty as a keen re-

membrance of troublous times, when every shred of cloth had its value, that made her still patch and darn, turn and mend, as long as there was a scrap of anything left, big enough to stick a needle into.

The memory of man or woman, let alone child, went not back to the time when anything she wore was new, or in Irish cousinship to any existing style. Queer to the verge of eccentricity she might be, but no one ever saw her ragged, dirty, or untidy; this, too, in spite of her weakness for "maccaboy," with which Dick always kept her supplied out of his own pocket-money. In the street, in cold weather, she wore men's boots; originally "tops," but cut down a third, and bound with red woollen binding, "The better to ken them, my dear, frae your ain," she would answer, when asked why. No drabbling dress-skirts encumbered her feet in walking, for her quilted petticoat cleared her instep by at least two inches. Such a quilted petticoat as it was, too! with such lovely fantastic curves and angles and shell-work in the stitching that it was more like a bit of arabesque designing than mere needle-work. If you praised the skirt, and asked if it were not extravagant for a woman like her to wear such a silk skirt, she would gleefully count the two hundred and thirteen pieces, savings of years from rag-bags and scrap-bags, in the various houses where she was ever a welcome guest, and say, "Rags

and brains make use and beauty." Over this hung a huge cloak of heavy, rusty serge, lined and wadded, and gathered to a circular yoke. Large arm-holes left her hands free, while inside and out were more pockets than would furnish a modern young lady's travelling-costume. Fastened round her neck was a queer, yellow, foxy fur cape, with funny little knobs at the edge, suggestive of tails worn down in strife, and long boa ends in front, reaching to the bottom of her cloak. Her hands were thrust into a great, limpsey muff, originally like the cape, but in the course of time having suffered assault by moth, and abrasion by wear, many repairs had been needful, and variously effected with fur of such divers shades and textures, that Dick always insisted that the muff was an album of loving remembrance of all Reno's pet cats and a few dogs. But the wonderful architectural achievement which she called a bonnet is beyond words to describe. There was silk and satin and velvet and quilling, to say nothing of the foundation thereof, to set up a modern millinery establishment. The only respect paid the fashion by the owner and builder was, with each pronounced change of style, to add a little something to the original. Were capes worn this year, one was added behind; were boas put on the crown, a boa blossomed on hers; were boas worn in front instead, never taking off anything previously at-

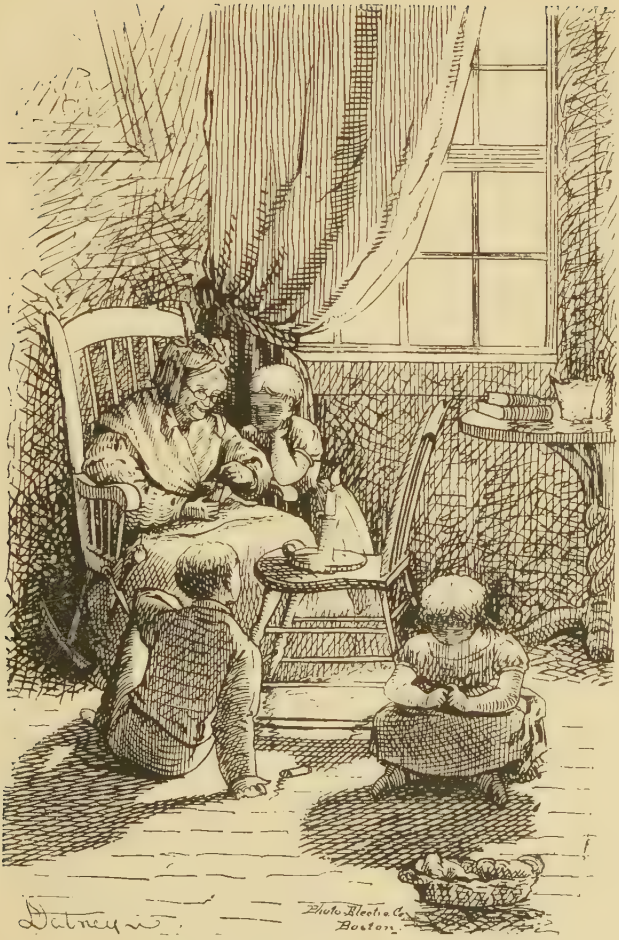
tached, a cluster of boas appeared in front. A pair of broad strings fluttered uselessly midway at each side, because once they were the fashion, while another pair did good service tying the long corners of the bonnet snugly under her chin. Yards of plaited muslin (with a cluster of spring flowers, buttercups and daisies, in the north-east corner) filled in the cavernous interior, forming a framework for a shrewd, kindly old face, round, ruddy, and wrinkled as a red-cheeked Roxbury russet at the end of May. But this last was not visible till, fairly inside the door, she untied, first a long, green barege veil, smoothed out the running strings, and folded it squarely, repeating the performance with a handsome sprigged black lace veil, at least a yard long, which, with great respect, she folded and patted and put into its special wrap of tissue paper. "Real thread, my dears. I always wear it when I come to your ma's."

Ellie took the bundle, Hetty the umbrella; and Dick, thrusting his hand into the limpsey muff, found what he expected, the big snuff-box, empty save of a few grains and a dry vanilla bean, its occupant for years, and still fragrant enough to flavor the maccaboy which was sure to be waiting for her in the little canister in Dick's room.

It was useless to offer to help. Reno knew "her room," which was always ready for her. Not a ques-

tion would she answer till everything had found its proper place. The boots stood under the cloak in the closet, with the cape and bonnet above, looking for all the world like Bluebeard's wife's grandmother. The bundle fairly filled the closet-shelf, while from unknown recesses came forth the essentials for Reno's house toilet. Carpet shoes of her own make replaced the walking-boots; a black silk skull-cap and a ruffled white one, with two inches of brown frizette pinned into the front, went on to her shiny bald head. Her big, silver-rimmed glasses succeeded the round horn ones worn in the street. A white, plaid muslin handkerchief was crossed over her bombazine fan waist, shirred and pointed, and crossed with intricate little folds and puffs, with sleeves of the old leg-o'-mutton cut, with "down puffers" inside. Queer mits like fingerless gloves were drawn over her hands. A big alpaca apron with a pocket-flap like a modern shoplifter's, and innumerable little pockets handy for spools, buttons, and the like, was tied round her waist, while from the belt hung shears, wax, and emery, emblems of her trade, and a bag that was the wonder and delight of all children, little and big, with whose contents we shall become better acquainted by and by.

The last preliminary was tacking to the front of her waist, by two little tabs, a huge oblong plaid pin-



RENO.

cushion, stabbed with pins of every shape and size, to say nothing of a score or so of needles, threaded with various colored silks, cottons, and yarns, ready for all possible emergencies, and carefully quilted into the cushion with the ends of thread wound round to prevent snarling.

Once established in her rocking-chair by the window (she was always particular to have the light over her left shoulder), made comfortable with a footstool of Hetty's thoughtful providing, and quite blissful over the freshly filled snuff-box which Dick placed in her hand, she was ready for questions.

CHAPTER XII.

RENO, CONTINUED.

EACH question, so eagerly poured forth, was characteristic of the enquirer.

From Dick: "I say, when will you quilt me a new bat-ball, and did you bring my guinea eggs? Old Silvertop's sitting, and there's a chance."

Hetty, always domestic and womanly, with a weakness for dainty little additions to her work-box, begged to know if Reno had brought her "any little red-topped pins."

"Better than that, my bonnie lassie, if ye ha' done as I bid and saved a' the broken needles. I'm going to show ye how to mak' them brawlie your ain sel'."

"O, Reno darling," cried Ellie, "I did try to save mine, too, but they all got lost; I guess Hetty picked up some. I'm sure I did my share breaking 'em."

"Sma' dout o' that, Miss Ellie. Hae ye done swinging your thumble on top of your needle yet? That only breaks points, and I canna' do a' thing wi' the rest."

Poor Ellie did not love to sew. It was before the days of sewing-machines, though there were rumors

in the air of some such blissful invention, which Ellie sincerely hoped might prove a reality before she was quite grown up; having visions of something like a miller's hopper, where the cloth might go in at one end and come out finished shirts, dresses, and aprons, at the other. Meantime, her sewing-lessons was her *bête noir*, and the sole bit of comfort to be found in it was by standing her needle upright in the desk or table, hanging her little silver thimble on top, and setting it ringing; whereby many needles suffered detriment, and the shirt for grandpa progressed but slowly. "It sounds just like fairy bells," she would say, "when you shut your eyes, lay your head on your desk, and just feel the air blowing softly, and smell the roses and hear that tiny chime."

Poor, dreamy Ellie! Her castles in Spain never needed more than that to grow into wondrous Alhambras of beauty, peopled with elves and fays, giants and dragons, with always a benign fairy godmother to set things right when they seemed hopelessly wrong; where all labor was forbidden, except story-telling and nut-cracking, and clothes "just belonged," like the birds', and never wore out; where always it was afternoon, and every afternoon was Saturday, and the golden bird and the singing water were close at hand, and the true prince waited only for the hour to strike.

What wonder if her question was neither about balls or eggs or little pins, but an earnest whisper for "the Berkeley book?"

"Ah, chiel, no o'er thy fantasy yet. Nae, nae, I ha' gotten tha' Berkeley buik fast enoo', but no, for your ain han's the while."

"But you will tell it to me to-night before I go to bed?"

"It is an eerie tale. And are ye sure it doesna' mak' ye grumlie an' frechen?'"

"O, no. I like to think I'm afraid, though, and run through the long hall."

"Aiblins I'm a daft woman to crack such feckless tales to a wean like yoursel'; but ye ha' speired each your ain, an' Dick the callant, for the sneesh, ye ken I canna' forget. So bring me the bag."

O, what a bag that was! Every color in the rainbow had its place. The material was some curious texture; in very truth the skirt of a royally magnificent dressing-gown, once worn by the governor of Fayal, in whose family Reno at one time was an inmate. There were griffins and birds, flowers and fruits, and a gorgeous silver-threaded snake winding in and out in the weaving, with curious eyes, or things, at all events, that looked like eyes, that peered through the intricate pattern. It was modelled after the reticules of our great-grandmothers' days, but am-

plified immensely. It had double drawing-strings with a ruff above. It had pockets at the side that buttoned down; it had pockets inside that drew up, and a central containing capacity that had never been measured, for no one had ever come to the bottom or seen it fairly emptied. In it lived, ordinarily, a huge yellow and red silk bandanna, the round black snuff-box with a gorgeous painting on the lid, a fat pocket-book, a fatter needle-book, a curious arrangement for skein cotton, something like the soldiers' indispensables, a set of scissors of various sizes, with the points carefully stuck into corks, a prayer-book and rosary, for, strange to say, Scotch woman as she was, old Reno was a devout Catholic (whereby hangs a tale worth telling), a pack of cards (the good woman was no gamester, but she could do more wonderful tricks, build taller houses and make funnier jumping-jacks from the knaves, than any modern juggler or toy-maker), an endless quantity of string (tough and light for kite-bobs, as Dick knew) all neatly rolled and looped, a huge jack-knife, every blade like a razor, with which the owner forestalled some modern cutting machines, cutting all her tailoring with a knife-point instead of scissors, blue chalk, red chalk, white chalk, a sailor's palm and sail needles, a dozen shoemakers' well-waxed ends (no mean cobbler was this dear old Reno), an awl and a clamp, a book of Chinese

embroidery patterns (secret of some of her wonderful work in that line), a precious red morocco miniature-case, which, on rare occasions, as reward of high merit, had been shown to the children who never wearied of the story belonging to it. But even that was passed by now, with the cramp-bones and cunning little eye-stones, and the horse-chestnuts for rheumatism; for sure enough there was a well-quilted bat-ball for Master Dick, and two pretty speckled guinea-hens' eggs, while sundry bits of sealing-wax and pieces of bamboo awaited Hetty, and Ellie's eyes were gladdened with just a glimpse of Monk Lewis's "Tales of Wonder," not the most wholesome reading in the world for a child like Ellie.

The gloaming would be time enough for the story-telling, and practical Hetty was for something more tangible.

"Come, Dick, get the little candle; it will be so nice to have some pins all made before mamma comes home."

Away went Dick for the candle, Ellie for the match-box, and Hetty for her store of broken needles.

"Wha gangs slow gangs far," quoth Reno, as Ellie stumbled over the threshold, scattering her matches far and wide. But order was soon restored, the candle was safely lighted, and Hetty counted twenty-seven broken needles, varying in size from a cambric-

needle to a darning-needle, quilted on a bit of scarlet flannel.

For an hour to come they were as busy as bees, while Reno initiated them into her art of pin-making; showing them with practical illustrations how to press the needle-points firmly and gently into the bamboo-tips, heating the wax in the clear flame of the candle, till a drop was ready to fall, touching it deftly with the end of the needle, whirling it quickly back and forth, up and down, till the molten drop cooled as round as a bead.

"O, Hetty, yours is as smooth as a pearl, and mine is all lob-sided, and the needle sticking through! And I've burned my finger. O-o-o-o!"

"That's because you watched me, Ellie, instead of seeing after your own."

"Dinna, be fashed, a' things gae mixtie-maxtie whiles. Try again. That's better. Haud it doon an no' oop, if ye wouldna' rin the wax on your fingers."

After several failures, and not a few little blisters, a row of shiny black and red headed pins rewarded the diligent workers. The next undertaking was a shawl-pin for grandma, Aunt Margaret, and mamma; the foundation of each to be a large darning-needle, broken at the eye. Dick chose grandma's, putting on a black head as big as a bullet. Hetty chose a red one for Aunt Margaret, to match her corals. Ellie, not

to be outdone in originality, combined the two for mamma, the result being rather like a mammoth smoky Guinea pea. But there was love enough wrought into all to give them value.

"Well, Reno, now we've got through, and cleared up, please tell us what you've come for?"

"Hoity toity! Is na' the sicht of me guid for sair een? Aiblins to bring the balls and the eggs, and to mak' sealing-wax pins."

"No, but that isn't the reason. You always come in April and September, and this is March, and we haven't any new clothes to make nor old ones to mend that I know of."

"Wonderfu', wonderfu'! an' past a' wonderfu'! Nae claes to men' for Ellie, nae breeks for the callant; and ye baith weel an' active!"

"Come quick, please,
And we won't tease,
That's a dear Reno,
Tell us if you mean to."

The big silver-bowed spectacles slipped a little farther down on the old lady's nose, the large kindly light eyes looked over the rims; out came the snuff-box and the bandanna; both were put to their respective uses; then, while the children waited for the explanation, Reno cocked her head on one side and began a favorite nursery jingle, —

"'Kimo, kimo, kimo, kimo,
Kimo, kildo, karo,
Stim, stam, pompo, diddle,
Pompo, diddle, larra, bono,
Rig, dom, bona, betta, kimo.'

"If mamma hasna' told you, ye must e'en bide a wee an' speir her. Like Tecumseh or some ither redskin, 'You've sent for me, an' I've come; if ye dinna, want me, I'll gang back agin.'"

Not another word but nonsense could they get from Reno. Pretty soon the supper-bell rang. Papa brought a gentleman home with him. However free the conversation at table when they were quite by themselves, when there were guests the old rule was rigidly observed, "Children must be seen and not heard," so there was no relief then. After tea there were lessons to be learned in the study, and not till bedtime was the mystery of Reno's unexpected advent explained.

Mamma called them, one by one, into her room, as they went up-stairs, and when they were all gathered round her lounge, she said, "My dear children, I am going to leave you a little while with Reno. Dr. John thinks that a change will do me good. Papa finds he can leave his business better now than later. To-morrow evening we start for New York, where we shall take the packet for Cuba. Aunt Margaret and grandma are going back to Kadesh to-morrow just the

same. We shall be gone about two months, my darlings. I would have told you sooner, but until to-night we thought there were two weeks to spare; but Dr. John is unwilling to have me wait any longer, — there will be barely time to take the next packet. I know you will be dear good children, while I am gone. Patsey will have her hands full with Fred and Harry and baby May, even with Dinah's help, so you must take care of yourselves, and let Reno settle all difficulties. I feel quite safe leaving her in charge.

"Richard, my boy, remember you are the gentleman of the house now, and must bear in mind the true type of the true gentleman, 'who eke in word and deed was very courtesie.'

"Ellie, darling, heedless Ellie, what can I say to you, save to entreat that your love for mammy keep you out of mischief, and help you to think before you act?

"Hetty, my little woman, to you I need not preach order or decorum, but rather patience towards the little ones; punctuality, the want of which will sadly annoy Reno; but above all 'patience,' whether it is with Ellie when she forgets her day's care of the room, with Dick when he teases Mother Prim, with Dinah when she is in her moods, or with Hetty her own self when she comes short of her own ideal.

"Ah, my darlings, yet one more word, 'Love one another.'"

The good-night kisses were very tender, not a word was spoken by either of the children as they went quietly up stairs, sobered and made very still by the suddenness of the whole thing.

Sleep came soon to Hetty's healthier conscience, but poor Ellie tossed and turned for a restless hour, till she could bear it no longer. Creeping softly down in her bare feet she found, with a thrill of pain and pleasure, that mamma's fire was still blazing fitfully, and mamma quite alone where she had left her on the lounge, apparently asleep. The little white-robed figure stole in like a spirit, just to look at her darling mammy once more; but her self-control was quite gone, and sobbing and crying she crept into the tender, loving arms that folded closely around the shivering child, while endearing words, warm caresses, and every sweet pet name she could think of were whispered in her ear.

"Mammy dearest, are you going to die? Was it our awful, wicked coasting? I shall never be happy again, never, never, never!" And then the poor child fell to kissing her mammy, and sobbing and crying fit to break her heart.

"Hush, Ellie darling! You will make yourself ill and you do me a great harm too. It was not the coasting, at least not all, though the fright was bad for me. You know I was not well last spring, and

our dear, good doctor thinks if I can get away from the sharp east-winds this spring, I shall come back well and strong before the violets are done blossoming, and in time for the roses. You must help by being very good, and writing me long, long letters, and telling me everything you do and say and hear and see."

"O, I will, mamma, and I'll keep a journal, and I will be good. I will be good as — as — as an arched angel, mammy dearest, if you will only come back well and strong!"

"I shall be satisfied to have you a good child, Ellie darling, without having you an angel just yet, or 'an arched angel,' either."

"Mamma, I hear some one coming softly. I guess — it — is Dick. May he come in too?"

It was Dick, sure enough, whose conscience was equally troubled with Ellie's. Big boy as he was, he was none too big to nestle in the mother-arms, and find comfort in her reassuring kiss and whispered belief that she really felt sure she should come back well and strong.

"O, you must, you must, get well. I should feel just like a murderer as long as I lived if you didn't. I shall see your white face just as I saw it at the window, till you come back with your lovely pink cheeks again. You are my beautiful mamma and my dear mamma, too!"

"She's the beautifulest and the dearest mamma in the whole world. Don't you suppose she is the handsomest lady in the world, anyway, Dick?"

"Of course she is. You nor Hetty, neither of you, will ever be half so handsome. Why, mamma, your cheeks are rosy now!"

"Ah, my boy, mamma is not too old to blush at such wholesale flattery from even so young and ardent a lover as Master Dick! Yet truly there are no lovers so sweet and sincere as child-lovers, and the kiss and caress a boy gives to his mother and receives from her is as nearly the love that is divine as anything we ever shall know this side of Heaven. But her roses will be white ones to-morrow, I fear. So once more good-night; let my loving kisses bring peace and rest to you both.

"'Tho' winds blow and rains fall,
The good God ruleth over all.'"

"Good-night! Good-night!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSOLATION.

THERE was plenty of bustle and stir next morning, and all day in fact. No one thought of school or lessons either. Aunt Margaret was busy enough with Madame Peyton's packing and her own, while Hetty and Ellie insisted on putting mamma's things into the big trunk, while she lay on the lounge giving needful directions. If there were precious little science in the disposition of boxes and parcels, nicely folded dresses, skirts, and wrappers, there was no small amount of ingenuity exercised, and the girls had a good lesson in packing. What Ellie put in crooked, Hetty straightened, and dear, sweet mamma never said a word when her box of dainty collars and ruffles was upset, and the contents of her work-box spilt into the bottom of the trunk. The labor of love was certainly lessened, and a satisfactory result made approximately possible, by Mrs. Adams's methodical, orderly ways; "mamma's wax-workiness," Ellie called it. At odd times she had made out an accurate list of everything to go into the trunk, and nothing remained but to go to bureau drawers and closets

and find everything in place and in order. Mamma's only share now, was to lie on the lounge, and check off on the list everything as fast as it disappeared in the yawning cavern of a trunk. Everything was in at last; Dick tugged manfully at the straps, tightening them to the final hole, finishing his labors by tacking on the card, bearing, in his most magnificent penmanship, a perfect legend in the way of an address.

The greater excitement of mamma's going quite swallowed up the lesser event of grandma's departure with Aunt Margaret, which preceded the other by a few hours only.

How they tried to lengthen out those last minutes! Dick brought mamma's coffee, and never once thought of being impatient because she drank it so slowly. Ellie would gladly have been five hours instead of five minutes buttoning the cloak and tying the bonnet, and Hetty would have been glad of a dozen knots in the lacings, if only the boots need not have been put on quite yet. But the dreaded hour struck. The crunching of the carriage-wheels in the gravel road was unmistakable, and papa's voice was heard cheerily as ever, —

"All aboard! Short good-bys! Come, Dick, your mother's satchel and umbrella."

"One moment, papa."

"What's this, Hetty? A lunch-basket! O you born housewife!"

"Ellie, Ellie!"

"Yes, yes; I forgot something. This is for you both by and by to keep up your spirits. I meant it for mamma's birthday; it isn't quite done."

A less patient, fond papa might have refused the bulky volume, which, hot and panting from her race to the attic where her treasures were concealed, Ellie placed in his hands; but papa kissed the eager face, and Ellie had mamma's last kiss after all. Every one knew it was Ellie's beloved scrap-book, a perfect *olla podrida*, fun and sentiment, fact and fancy, her cuttings for the past two years.

"Capital, Ellie, capital thought! After Hetty's sandwiches and cold chicken, we can be sure of a 'feast of reason and a flow of soul.'"

"Good-by! Good-by!"

They were fairly off; no time for crying or long leave-taking. It was best so. The little ones did not realize it at all, and were content to turn away for a noisy frolic with Patsey, while Dinah took refuge in a whirlwind of pots and pans, tins and brasses, convinced that every one of them needed scouring before bedtime. That was her way of working it off.

It did indeed seem as though the whole heart had gone out of the house. Three more disconsolate faces

than Dick's, Hetty's, and Ellie's, it would be hard to imagine. It was fortunate, indeed, that Reno was able to be there, for no one less infinite in capacity for entertainment, or less sympathetic, would have been of any avail. She was truly one who had taken to heart the Psalmist's injunction to rejoice with those that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep, believing, also, that there was a fit time to laugh and dance as well as mourn and cry. She would have danced a hornpipe, sung "Lillibullero," or wept over "Lycidas," with equal heartiness and sincerity.

Reno was a universal genius, who, in her own person, contradicted the cheap wisdom of "Jack at all trades, good at none." Everything she undertook seemed her specialty till she did the next thing; then that was best, and so on through the catalogue. She deserves an immortality greater than I can give her. There was no gap she could not fill, no circumstance to which she was not equal, from making dainty bridal and birth robes to giving the last tender touch to those for whom she made the fair white robes of rest.

Equally skilled in household economies, she was the envy of French cooks, whom she surpassed on their own ground of creating savory somethings out of unsavory nothings, while her knack at confectionery, fancy kickshaws and flummeries, surpassed even Di-

nah's, who, it must be confessed, was a little jealous of the canny Scotchwoman.

Acknowledged queen of mantuamakers, milliners, tailoresses, and cooks, there was yet another gift which made old Reno dearer still to the hearts of the children of our story. This was her exhaustless store of ballads and songs of the olden time, fairy lore and hobgoblin stories, legends of the Norsemen or of Greece and Rome, border ballads or pirate ditties. There was never an allusion to myth or rhyme that she could not cap it with "That's no' sae muckle, hark ye, noo!" Then, if time and opportunity offered, and she had even one good listener, which, indeed, she never lacked if Ellie was in the house, she would open her mental treasure-house, and give without stint.

I do not really think I should want my little girlie, in this year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-six, to revel in the horrors of "The Old Woman of Berkeley," or "Bishop Bruno," or many another of Southey's intensified versions of monkish legends; but, for all that, we, in the long ago, were never weary of it, and, though listening for the hundredth time, always felt the creeping chill and shuddered at the right time at the very opening verse, —

"The raven croaked as she sat at her meal,
And the old woman knew what she said;

And she grew pale at the raven's tale,
And sickened and went to her bed."

The excitement lasted through the whole of forty-six verses that I cannot recall now without a certain tremor. We always joined in with the swaying rhythm at, —

"The loud commotion like the rushing of ocean
Grew momently more and more,
And strokes as of a battering-ram
Did shake the strong church-door.

"And the choristers' song, that late was strong,
Grew a quaver of consternation;
For the church did rock, as an earthquake shock
Uplifted its foundation."

More than once Ellie and Dick had privately attempted to illustrate the scareful ballad, coming out strong with a great deal of vermilion and chrome yellow, and a reckless waste of India ink on

"... the black horse there,
Whose breath was red like furnace smoke,
His eyes like a meteor's glare."

But to return to the disconsolate children, as they reluctantly went back to the house after watching the carriage out of sight and sound. Left to themselves they would have scorned the thought of supper, and moped round in corners as properly expressive of their grievous and forlorn condition. But that was no part of Reno's *régime*, as old Dinah herself very well knew;

so out of the tumult and disorder of the kitchen, which not a soul in the house was brave enough to face, in due time appeared as dainty and appetizing a supper as ever comforted three heart-broken mortals. Was it possible to resist cartwheel flapjacks, savory with butter and sugar, spicy with nutmeg, piled hot and hot at least ten deep; or such an omelette with a suspicion of ruddy shreds of ham, to say nothing of popovers and the bubbling silver chocolate-pot? Not our sensible little folks of long ago, I'm sure. Perhaps if all this had been a quarter of a century later they might have found hygienic comfort in cracked wheat and a glass of water, not iced; but this isn't a treatise on the cause, cure, and prevention of dyspepsia, but only a truthful record of long ago, when we did have good breakfasts, dinners, and suppers, and heartily enjoyed them, without any horrible "after clapper-declawing." Perhaps our regular hours and constant out-door life had something to do with our immunity from the worst foe that flesh is heir to.

Having complied with Reno's condition, which like many of her rules was a topsy-turvying of established ones, and read this time, "No supper, no song," she was at their beck and call for the rest of the evening. They gathered in the library, Reno in the big arm-chair, sacred to papa when he was at home, Dick stretched on the rug before the fire, his favorite atti-

tude, the girls on either side of the arm-chair on their favorite low ottomans. Firelight was voted best for story-telling, and as the wood crackled and snapped, now bursting into a bright blaze, and again dying away to a dull red glow, the faces of the children were sometimes in the light and sometimes in the shadow, while Reno herself, chanting the old songs in a quaint monotone of recitative peculiar to herself, seemed like some old sibyl relating the experience of another age, another world. If I do not always give her racy Scotch idiom in recalling her stories, it is because, though quite intelligible to us who had heard it from our infancy, to the little readers of to-day it might seem hard to follow. Of course we had the whole of "The Old Woman of Berkeley," then Dick shouted for, —

> "The wildgrave winds his bugle horn
> To horse, to horse, halloo, halloo!"

The fifty verses of "The Wildgrave" were forthcoming, to Dick's huge satisfaction. Then "Goody Blake and Harry Gill;" then for Hetty her favorite "*Die Erlkönig*," in the German first, and afterwards in a free but spirited translation, that I have never met elsewhere and cannot recall. I think Reno's German accent with her Scotch twist would sound very funny to-day; but we were not critical, and, in Hetty's words, "There's always something mysteri-

ously beautiful in a thing when you don't know just what it means."

Not the first one in the world, Miss Hetty, who admires in proportion to their ignorance.

"Now something new, Reno; something we never heard."

"Nae, nae, I'm only a clishmaclaver when it comes to braw new tales. What would ye wi' new ones? Arena' the auld anes bonnier, an' lashins of 'em?"

"The old ones are lovely, but you promised us a new one the last time, and now is just the very best time in the world for it."

"And please let it be a fairy story."

"Weel, weel, I kenned how it would be. Aiblins it's nae better than the auld stories, but I havena' told ye 'The Princess and the Slave.'"

"O you darling! is it truly a fairy story, and not one of the old ones? O Hetty! won't it be splendid? Next week is our amusement week, and we didn't know what we should get up. You see we've done 'Cinderella' and 'Graciosa and Percinet' and 'Bluebeard,' till we are tired of them. If it is only something none of the other girls have ever had it will be just mag!"

"Nificent, Ellie, if you please. Papa says we are not to talk slang."

"*Magnificentoribus!* There, that sounds classical,

I'm sure. Please don't look so wise and good, Hetty; I'm sure papa would not mind just to-night."

"You see, Reno, every Saturday, if we have had a good average, Mr. Parker dismisses us after roll-call, at recess, and we have the rest of the morning for some amusement we have planned through the week; and the teachers come down, and the seventy-five-percenters from the other classes, and it's great fun. Yes, we have the cellar for our play-house, and put a rope round the brick pillars, and the audience is outside all round, and we are inside, and our dressing-rooms are back of the furnace. You know the cellar is light and dry, with a smooth, cemented floor. Sometimes we have an accordion, and a hand-organ that belongs to one of the girl's brothers, for an orchestra."

"Will there be a part for me?" quoth Dick. "I'm great on the tyrants; like bully Bottom, 'Ercles' vein becomes me rarely, — 'raging rocks and shivering shocks!'"

"Dinna fash yoursel' for a tyrant; the bonnie true prince is for you, and the scornfu' princess, sae luvely but no' sae unco, guid Miss Hetty maun depict, an' pranksome Ellie the peri who disguises herself to work wonders; an' the sunny-haired wean ye ca' Goldy for Selima."

"She means Nellie Alden. Now begin."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRINCESS AND THE SLAVE.

"ONCE upon a time, far away in an Eastern land, whose golden sunsets are our dawning, dwelt a young prince, so strong and so handsome, so noble and so brave, so kind and so courteous, that there never was seen his like in all Cathay; and his name was Noyama. He was the only son of a mighty king, and heir to a throne bounded by the morning and the evenning. Now this strong, handsome, brave, noble, kind, courteous Prince Noyama had everything in the world to make him happy, except a princess to share his throne, and double his pleasures, and divide his troubles, which, small as they were, he would have been glad to make smaller. To remedy this misfortune, the mighty king, his father, had sent messengers through the length and breadth of his own land and even to Prester John's domain, bidding to his son's birthday festival the fairest and wealthiest ladies in the world; but the difficult young prince, though he received them with great courtesy and always danced once with each new-comer, invariably asked one question, 'Have you the pearl of great price?'

and always they looked startled and afraid; and when he repeated the question, as he was sure to, while regaling them with orange sherbet and macaroons, they were more frightened still, and privately decided that the handsome Prince Noyama was a little mad (such a pity!), and were not quite sure whether being queen of even a kingdom bounded by the morning and the evening were compensation for having a mad prince as a husband. But they were quite safe, for the prince never spoke to any of them a second time.

"Then his father and his mother and the grand high councillor himself, a bashaw of at least thirty-nine tails, lost all patience, too, when they could get no answer from the wilful young prince but just this: —

"'I want the beautiful maiden who has the pearl of great price, and her only will I wed.'

"And the astrologers and the magicians and the soothsayers were consulted; a flock of birds was let loose; three hundred and sixty-five kites were flown, and everybody watched to see in what direction they were to go to find the maiden who had the pearl of great price. But half the birds flew east, and half the birds flew west; and the half that flew east came back from the north, and the half that flew west came back from the south, and the three hundred and sixty-five kites went straight up in a whirlwind, and never were seen or heard of any more.

"Then nobody knew anything, and, of course, everybody looked as though they knew everything; and the whole company, soothsayers, astrologers, magicians, and the lord high councillor himself, would have made splendid owl-pictures. But it is only the Dutchman's owl who knows enough to keep up his reputation for wisdom by silence. So at last the king got impatient, and insisted on some sort of an answer.

"Then, to say something quite safe and non-committal, but which sounded really very sensible, and quite as if they were prepared to start in the morning if the king said so, they proclaimed that the pearl of great price was only to be found in the land east of the sun and west of the moon, which was the reason the birds and the kites could not find it.

"Then the old king was in utter despair, and stormed round the great Hall of the Winds and tore his hair, or would have done so if it hadn't hurt, so he tore the old lord high councillor's instead, as he happened to stand quite handy. This was not at all nice for the lord high councillor, but the thing had happened so often before that he always wore a flowing wig in the presence of his imperial master, thereby saving his head at the expense of an occasional barber's bill.

"When the king had relieved his feelings a little, and the dais was quite strewn with white hair, Prince

Noyama's mother came to the rescue. Now, she was the famous Queen Guldare, whom every one knew to be a wise as well as a good woman; as for her beauty, that had been gone so long that no one ever thought about it at all. Because she was so very wise, she knew perfectly well that it would have been quite useless to suggest any plan of her own, till the king had tried his and found it an utter failure. But she knew that a drowning man catches at a straw, and her straw was a bit of advice.

"'To-morrow is the birthday of our royal son, the Prince Noyama. You have spent three hundred and sixty-five days since his last birthday doing nothing; at all events you have accomplished nothing, and have lost three hundred and sixty-five magnificent dragon-tail kites. To-day is the three hundred and sixty-sixth, for it is leap-year, and to-morrow, as I said, is the first of March, and Prince Noyama's birthday. Now, last year you invited every body, on gilt-edged silk paper, except the prince's godmother, my mother's cousin, the peri Alcmenahrah. She was offended, naturally enough, and would not come. As if she were going to put up with a hasty message scribbled on a bit of parchment! Palimpsest at that! Well, I have done better this time; I have invited her alone for to-morrow, on crystal paper, with golden sunshine edges; and the words are like rainbows, for they were written

with a pencil of light. She will come, and all will be well.'

"The king said nothing, — silence is so safe. If it went wrong he could say, 'I did not advise you, my dear;' if it turned out right, 'Certainly, my dear, my silence was approval.' So true is it that if speech be silvern, silence is golden; for the words of silence were never written.

"The queen's words were so convincing that everybody went to bed and slept soundly all night. With the dawn, into the pavilion of the young prince came the peri Alcmenahrah; but she stole in as softly as the sunlight, and her presence filled all the room before Noyama knew she was coming. Then she touched the young prince lightly with her glittering wand, and spoke.

"'Shall I find for you the pearl of great price? Will you take her at my hands, and wed her, though she have no other portion?'

"'O gracious and most beloved of godmothers! is there truly in the whole world the pearl of great price, such as I dreamed of last night, and have dreamed of every night before my birthday that I can remember? Or does the maiden dwell in the land east of the sun and west of the moon?'

"'Yes, Noyama; there is in the world the pearl of great price, and the maiden dwells also in the land

east of the sun and west of the moon; for that land, though no man knows it, is the true fairy land, that is around and about and in this other world. In it dwell all pure, good, beautiful things, for it is the land of unselfish love. I will find for you the pearl of great price, for I alone know the test before which the true one will glow more brightly, while the false one will wither away; but you must give me till sunset, for I have far to go, and the way is long. Besides I must veil my brightness and the glory of my plumage in other garb, and wear once more the vesture and aspect of mortals.'

"No one saw the peri pass out from the castle; but an old beggar woman, crippled and in rags, plodded wearily down the road and over the bridge; and the prince, when they came to tell him that breakfast was ready, only said he had had such a pleasant dream that he was going to turn over and go to sleep again till sunset. So he ordered his pavilion closed, and the flag went up, and every one knew that Prince Noyama slept; or at least they thought he did.

"But our brave, courteous prince had no notion of sleeping away the time till his godmother should appear; when, too, there might be something for him to do that would help, although Alcmenahrah didn't say anything about it. So he got up and dressed himself, without any help, a most uncommon thing for a

prince to do, and over his gorgeous clothes he put on a dark burnouse serape, which completely enveloped him, drawing the hood over his black hair and glittering crown (for in stories princes always wear their crowns), then he went hastily out by a private stairway, and, running at full speed, about a mile from the castle he overtook the old beggar woman.

"She did not seem displeased, but said only, 'Use your eyes and your ears, and rest your tongue. Wisdom is the daughter of observation and discretion.'

"How far they travelled the prince never knew, and of course he did not ask any questions. At last they came to a magnificent pavilion in a perfect wilderness of flowers. Orange-flowers made the air heavy with perfume, silver fountains danced and played in the sunlight to cool the air. It was high noon; the heat and languor of the day were almost insupportable. In the midst of this bower of beauty, on a bed of fresh roses, lay a lovely princess, as beautiful as the sun, thought Noyama. Her name was Nouronihar, and Noyama would have been glad to believe that she owned the pearl of great price; but he remembered in time that 'Wisdom is the daughter of observation and discretion,' so he kept silence.

"Around the couch of this lovely princess flowed a gentle stream, clear as crystal. Its murmur made delicious music; to look at it was coolness; to drink

of it would have been delight. Beside the beautiful Princess Nouronihar stood a young girl; no haughty daughter of a king, only a Georgian slave, whose duty through the long, sultry day was to fan away, with a gorgeous fan of peacock's feathers, the butterflies and other presumptuous winged creatures that might annoy her royal mistress.

"'A mild and simple maid was she,
Of common form, and born of low degree,
Whose only charms were smiles devoid of art,
Whose only wealth a gentle, feeling heart.'

"A slight sound of rustling branches waked the princess. To be disturbed by the falling of a rose-leaf made her angry, as every one knew; and this, this was too much. A beggar had intruded into her sacred bower! An old woman, trembling with years, with want and woe, with tattered garments and a voice full of plaintive misery, was asking her for a cup of cold water from the fountain at her side, —

"'Beneath our Mithra's scorching fire,
I sink enfeebled and with thirst expire;
Yon stream is near, oh, list a sufferer's cry,
And reach one draught of water, lest I die.'

"Noyama watched eagerly for what should follow. But the beauty of the princess was disfigured by a frown, and the music of her voice became harsh, as she

flung a jewelled bracelet at the old woman's feet with these words: —

"'Beggar, begone, and let these clamors cease,
This buys at once your absence and my peace!'

"Then the haughty princess turned her head away and slept again, while her bracelet lay unheeded at the beggar's feet. But Selima, the young Georgian slave, after fanning her mistress a few moments to make sure that her sleep was sound, laid aside the gorgeous fan of peacock's feathers, went softly to the fountain's brink, dipped the lotus bowl deep into the sparkling waters, and brought it to the poor old woman; raising her fainting head with gentle hand, while in a low, sweet voice she spoke these words: —

"'Humble and poor, I nothing can bestow,
Except these tears of pity for your woe.
'Tis all I have, but yet that all receive
From one who fain your sorrow would relieve.
The princess' sleep is sound, you need not fear;
Drink, mother, drink, the wave is cool and clear.'

"Scarce had the stranger's lips touched the proffered cup, when, to the young Selima's surprise, the bowed figure raised itself, the tattered garments fell away. A robe of shining white, golden wings, a silver wand, flowing hair like sunlight, and a beauty beyond that of earth, proclaimed that before her was a

daughter of the World of Light. The glad cry of surprise and pleasure that burst from Selima's lips roused Nouronihar herself in time to hear the peri salute Selima as the pearl of great price, and hail her as the destined bride of the Prince Noyama. To Nouronihar, Princess of Golconda, the peri left these parting words: —

> "'Remember well, ill will and frowns bestowed
> Favors offend, and gifts become a load.
> Crowns to a feeling mind less joy impart
> Than trifles offered with a willing heart.'

"One touch of her silver wand brought to Selima's face and form the beauty and grace that dwelt in her heart. Fair wings of azure and pinions of light wafted the beautiful bride and the young prince (who no longer needed to hide within the ugly burnouse, for in learning the lesson of wisdom he had also learned the lesson of love) back to the land bounded by the morning and the evening.

"As the sunset rays flooded the pavilion, the old king was awaiting the signal-gun, to arouse the Prince Noyama, whom all believed to be slumbering still. Silently as Alemenahrah had entered the palace with the dawning, so in the golden radiance of evening, hand in hand, the prince and his pearl of great price entered the pavilion of the king, filling it with joy and peace, children of unselfish love;

while the bulbul sang in the rose thicket, and the western breeze was heavy with fragrance from Araby the Blest. But where Alcmenahrah had been standing the moonlight fell soft and white."

"Is that all, dear Reno? I think it is just lovely! And were they happy ever after? What became of Nouronihar? What did the lord high chancellor say? And did the astrologers find out where the land east of the sun and west of the moon really was? And did they always keep friends with Alcmenahrah? And where is really Golconda and really Cathay? And — "

"Nae, nae, dinna' fash in sae mony superfluities o' speirin. The tale is a bonny tale, an' needs nae Alfred David to mak' it unco' guid. Bide content in beauty an' truth in allegory, parables or fairy lore wi'out seekin' for facts. Facts maybe are stubborn; o' nae manner o' use, but a support an' a stay it may be for adornment, wi'out whilk wud be but a ramshackle skeleton wi' protrudin' eends. An' ye are wise ye winna' rub the bloom frae the plum, nither the down frae the butterfly, nither the fancy fra' Reno's story. Whilk is no' sae muckle hers as the dooce mon's wha wrote the 'Wonder Book.' An' ten strikin' noo by the ha' clock, an' ye starin' wide awake instead of in your beds; no' anither word. Aiblins ye dinna' ken I can flyte weel. Guid-nicht, bairns."

So the old lady stayed alone by the firelight, muttering Gaelic in a fashion quite unintelligble to any one but herself; a habit she was prone to after story-telling, falling rapidly into her Scotch idiom when she began to moralize.

It would not have been in keeping with facts (for which as a narrator *I* have a respect, if Reno hadn't) not to confess that, late as it was, the whole cast of the drama was arranged for next amusement week before Dick said "Good-night;" while a few details of costuming and stage property were attended to before Ellie and Hetty were sufficiently relieved of responsibility to echo to each other sleepily enough, "Good-night," "Good-night."

CHAPTER XV.

LETTERS.

DEAREST, SWEETEST MAMMA: — First I kiss you, and hug you, and squeeze you, which I would like to do every hour in the day. We miss you awfully, but we are all very good. You can ask Reno and Dinah, too. And we are all very well. That is all Dinah says you want to know, and that it wastes time, to say nothing of stationery, to say any more; but I don't think so. I want to tell you about our play. It was the best we have had this winter; and Mr. Parker came down himself to see it; only after I'd learned Alcmenahrah, I couldn't be it, because, you know, peris have long light hair, and are fluffy; and I am not. So Goldy Alden was the peri, and, oh, wasn't she beautiful! And Hattie Lawrence was the princess, because she is handsome, and can look scornful too. Hetty was Selima, and just as sweet as she could be, with her hair in a net, with sequins, — I mean some little shiny things Mr. Lawrence let us have, — and Mr. Parker said they looked just like sequins. They jingled, and she wore Aunt Margaret's white dress and your old brown double-gown outside, because it

pulled off easy when Goldy — I mean Alcmenahrah — touched her with the wand; and Goldy made her wear her rose-pink sash, because she said it was just like her cheeks.

I think Hetty is perfectly beautiful, and I'm so glad she is my sister! And she sang her verses so prettily that all the people made her sing them over again. We couldn't have a real running stream in the cellar, so we had a marble vase full of real water for a fountain, and we took the funny dish Uncle Will brought home, for the lotos bowl, and it looked real *ever-so-far away*, with the shiny figures on it and the red inside. Hetty thinks we ought not to have taken it, because perhaps it wasn't made to be wet, but we wiped it dry. I guess the shiny stuff wasn't put on very tight, for some of it rubbed off when I was wiping it. The princess was "utterly gorgeous," Dick says; but I think he was making fun. Hattie brought all her mother's jewelry and a real India shawl and a green satin dress, and we made a bed of roses of all the shawls and cloaks; and I took the rose chintz bedspread, and it looked almost real. You know the roses are "bigger than life and twice as natural," Dick says. Hattie had on the green satin and the shawl tied round her waist, and gold chains and bracelets and ear-rings tied on, and pink silk stockings and embroidered satin slippers. Reno said Hattie had

more than ten dollars' worth of finery, — I mean ten thousand dollars' worth, — but you know her grandma lets her take all her mother's things. Dinah lent Hetty — that's Selima — her really peacock-feather duster, that she made herself, for Selima to wave over Nouronihar.

I just wish you could have seen Goldy! She had on, first, a white tarletan, ever so many skirts, that she had made for the fairy tableau last year, and wings of gauze and wire that folded down, and her hair was braided tight, — I mean it was braided tight the night before, and combed out so it was a cloud almost to her feet; and she had a blue gauze scarf, just as pale as the sky, over her, and she just looked as if she might fly when she stood on tiptoe; but when she was the old woman she had a brown backgammon with a hood on, and she stooped down and talked like an old beggar. It was beautiful when she turned away from the bracelet which the princess threw to her, and took the water from the lotos bowl; then, just in an instant, she threw off the backgammon. Dick is looking over my shoulder, and laughing at me; he says it wasn't a *backgammon*, but a *domino;* some people wear them at mask balls. I guess you know. I only remembered it was some sort of a game. Well, Goldy had practised it ever so many times, and there was a string on the backgam —

no, domino, and we pulled it at the right time, and it was all unfastened in front and came off just as nice! And then she just shook herself, and her wings opened, and her hair fluffed up like dandelion puffs, and she stretched out her wand to Selima, and her brown dress came off, but not so easy because of the trousers legs; but she had to have those, for Dick said it wouldn't be Oriental if she didn't.

I haven't told half nor quarter, but I've used up all my paper, and Dick says he'll put in what I left out; so no more from

Your loving little daughter,

ELLIE.

DEAR MAMMA: — Reno is a trump, no mistake! Did you know she knew Latin? She helps me with my Cæsar almost as good as papa; but it's funny to hear her conjugate. I never thought Latin could be funny till I heard it with a Scotch brogue. She says her father was a minister of the kirk, and she used to hear the boys recite; he had fellows come to study with him, and he was some sort of a fellow himself. I shouldn't wonder if she knew Greek too. Isn't it gay? she never will tell you she knows a thing till you get stuck bad; then when it's a real poser, and a fellow can't get it out, then she ups and tells you all about it. She's told us lots of stories, all the old

ones, and a jolly new one, "The Princess and the Slave," that Ellie has been telling you about. I was to be the Prince Noyama, but they won't have any boys in their amusement plays, so I couldn't. But we peeped in at the cellar-window, and saw it all. I mean just some of us boys who were brothers, you know, and all that. Ellie wrote out the play, from a story Reno told the night you went away, and she made some verses for Hetty to sing. O, I forgot! Ellie was the prince, and looked just like a boy, with her thick curly hair parted on one side, and a tiny black mustache I coaxed her to let me make for her, just like Prince Camaralzaman. She had on Uncle Will's green velvet smoking-cap, and your bird-of-paradise feather. It was gay! I don't know what her clothes were, but they looked like the yellow damask curtains that used to be in the front parlor. Reno fixed her, and made a gold crown out of gilt paper; and I saw her tie round her waist the piece of bandanna that papa bought for Dinah's handkerchiefs; and she had a scimitar and a dagger and a shield.

There's something else, about Easter, but I guess Hetty will tell you that.

Tell papa Harry Alden and I and Jim Lawrence are making a fire-engine, a real Hunneman tub. We are to have a regular fire company. Some boys down

in Grab Village have got one, but ours will beat. We are going to have a trial by and by, and the one that plays the highest stream is going to have a prize of a trumpet. Tell papa, too, I had eighty for Latin last week, and ninety for mathematics, so he need not be afraid that our Hunneman tub is running away with my lessons. Mr. Kneeland says I'm stronger on mathematics and mechanics than I am on Latin.

Your affectionate son,

RICHARD ADAMS.

MY DEAR MAMMA:—I am not quite sure that Ellie and Dick have left anything for me to tell you, except that I love you dearly and miss you very much. I think I will read their letters first, and then I shall know what they have omitted.

I have read them both now, but I think Ellie has done what Reno calls harnessing the cart before the horse; so I am going to begin at the beginning. It was the night you went away, when we were all so unhappy, that Reno told us the beautiful new story of "The Princess and the Slave; or, The Pearl of Great Price."

We sat up till ten o'clock; but I think it was better than going to bed earlier, because Dinah had given us a very hearty supper, and I know you do

not like to have us go to bed right after eating. I wrote down the story, but without any Scotch brogue; for it never reads the same as it sounds when Reno talks. You must read it when you come home, and Ellie's play, which is the dialogue, and the little songs. Mr. Parker said it was so good that Ellie must try for the prize song for Easter this year. You know only the first-class girls have ever sent in verses; but Mr. Parker said genius knew no age nor clime nor color, and we must remember that. Well, Ellie was afraid, but I coaxed her, and Dick coaxed, and we all said how pleased you would be if she tried, even if she did not get the prize. You know the prize is a beautiful basket of Easter eggs, painted by Mr. Parker's sister, with birds and flowers and butterflies, all emblems of immortality and fresh life, Mr. Parker says.

Next Sunday is Easter, and to-morrow we are to know whose verses have won the prize; and then they will be printed for our Easter carol, and we shall practise it to whatever music Mr. Mason selects, and sing it at church and at Sunday-school. I do hope Ellie will get it! Any way, I have copied her verses, and send them to you, for I think they are ever so much better than the ones we sang last year.

We try to remember all you said. I have not been

late to breakfast once, and only began once to scold Dick and stopped.

Your very loving daughter,

HETTY.

SONG FOR EASTER.

Easter morning, fair and bright,
Banishes the gloom of night.
Hallelujah!
Death is vanquished; cease the strife,
Crown the victor Lord of life!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Sweet April buds so softly swell,
Sweet April birds so gently tell;
Hallelujah!
Songs of love on bush and tree,
In the sunshine warm and free!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Bring, then, all your garlands gay,
Singing still a joyous lay,
Hallelujah!
All the world is fresh and fair;
Let our hearts the gladness share.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Hear the merry church-bells ring,
Hear the happy children sing,
Hallelujah!
Joyfully to greet the dawn
Of the gladsome Easter morn.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Hear the sweet and joyous sound
Thrilling all the glad world round,
Hallelujah!
Bird and flower and church-bells say,
Christ the Lord has risen to-day.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

O MAMMA, MAMMA, MAMMA! — Mine were the best, I've got the prize! It's going to be printed on a sheet of paper in red and black, with a lubricated title (Dick says it's rubricated, not lubricated); and all the children will learn it, and we shall sing it straight up into Heaven for the angels to hear. We are to wear white, — all white, with Easter lilies in our hands, and come in like a procession, singing; and, mamma, I am to walk first, because it is the post of honor.

Dear mamma, is it wrong to be glad, even if I am a little girl? I mean, is it wrong to be glad I won the prize, even though somebody else was made sorry? I don't think I thought half so much about the prize as I did about writing something that would be really poetry, and not just rhymes, which always come so easy. Mr. Parker patted me on my head, and smiled, and said, "Go on, dear, we shall be proud of you some day, if you follow in your grandmother's steps." Do you suppose he meant our real grandma? Should you be glad if I could write things like "Over the

Brook to Grandmamma," and all the other pretty things in the little red book?

I'm so happy, and so glad, I could fly! I just have to sit down tight in my chair to keep from jumping and shouting and laughing. If only you were to be here, mammy darling!

Your own, own

ELLIE.

Who can tell how such letters gladdened the mother's heart, far away? Who can tell what part they played in the curative process? Soft summer air, instead of biting east-winds, the right to enjoy the *dolce far niente*, earned only too painfully by invalids, the tender care of the best of husbands, the certainty that all was well at the Cedars, and by every boat such full outpouring of loving detailed home-life, — everything was in Mrs. Adams's favor. If the two months lengthened into three, it was to make a certainty of what had only been a hope, by escaping even the last flying footsteps of May's chilly days.

The snowdrops had indeed come and gone; the pale, early violets — known to the children as coffee-flowers, pretty but scentless — had given place to the deeper tinted, fragrant wood-violet; crocuses and hyacinths were things of the past; but the porch was a glory of roses and honeysuckles, when the same group that

had tearfully said good-by to their beloved mamma gathered once more to welcome her home.

Not only home, but well and strong, with just the loveliest wild-rose tint in her smooth, fair face, justifying even Dick's enthusiastic assertion that "his mamma was younger and handsomer than ever, and beat all the other boys'!" — meaning, it is supposed, the other boys' mammas. I think the children were all very proud of their lovely young mother, who never regretted her own very early marriage (though she was afterward loath to have her daughter follow her example), because it kept her so near her children's young life. How could she fail to sympathize with them, and enter heartily into their joys and sorrows, when her own youth was so close at hand?

It was at least a week before things settled into their accustomed grooves and Reno could be spared; but she promised to come again in the fall, and some time, if the children were very good, to tell them a new story and a true story, that would not be a play story, but which they were sure to like, because it would be about the miniatures.

It is surprising how soon a household accustoms itself to changes, if the governing head is clear and the governing hand steady. It did seem almost hopeless for a day or two; every one was so crazy with delight, from the children to Dinah and the live-

stock, who seemed, even to the pigeons and chickens, Betsey and Sport, to know that mamma had come home. But after a time, except for Mrs. Adams's improved health, no one would have guessed that the home life had been interrupted for a day. School days came and went. Dick teased Ellie, and was, for all that, her sworn confederate; and Hetty, never learning wisdom by experience, was continually over-persuaded to aid and abet Ellie in her wild pranks.

CHAPTER XVI.

UP OR DOWN.

"O CHILDREN! I know something splendid for this afternoon, — the very best thing we ever tried yet! Come, Hetty! come, Dick! I want to tell you all about it."

"We're coming right along, little mother. Come, Hetty, Ellie has another cat scrape for us, I guess."

"Richard Adams, you are just hateful! I won't tell you anything about it: there, now! You know I didn't mean to hurt the cat. Papa said you should not tease me about it. Uncle Will told me cats had nine lives, and I didn't think one would make any difference. Besides, she did come down on her feet. I knew she would."

"But you didn't know she would object to coming down again three stories at once, so strongly as to half scratch Hetty's eyes out and almost get me a caning for 'aiding and abetting,' as papa called it. I've joined the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals since, so I'm in no danger. Come, kiss and make up, Ellie, and let's have the new experiment."

"Yes, Ellie, you know I didn't mind half so much

as you did about the scratch; it wasn't so bad as it looked, after the blood was washed away. Please tell us. We'll help, won't we, Dick?"

"Of course we will, Hetty. O, botheration! Why can't you make up, little mother?"

It was a fashion, as we have seen, with these three little folks, — no one knew how it originated, — to call Ellie "little mother." Perhaps from a certain patronizing way she always assumed toward them, especially to Dick, who, at this time, was at the advanced age of twelve, while the girls were only ten. Almost the first word Ellie ever spoke in her babyhood, after the conventional "papa" and "mamma," was "chilluns," a form of address she invariably used as she grew older, whenever she desired to speak to Hetty and Dick collectively. Latterly, by a great effort, she had given the word the correct pronunciation, but would have felt shorn of half her dignity, had they resented the title, or stopped calling her "little mother."

Leader as well as originator in all the scrapes, with a genius for experiments, never in the least daunted by their apparent hopelessness or the personal risk incurred, it was an unceasing wonder to the whole household, and to mamma in particular, how the child had so far escaped broken bones.

In mamma's absence she had become interested in

experimental philosophy. Many a lesson had she failed to commit in school hours because she could not shut her ears to the fascinating recitation in "Olmstead." There was no separate class-room; and the child devoured with delight and avidity every word she could catch when the senior class went up to Mr. Parker's desk to recite.

She had swung pendulums, and rigged pulleys down the well of the staircase, hitting poor Dinah a tremendous whack on the head with the dumb-bell which she had suspended by the clothes-line, to count the vibrations, and nearly killed the dear old tortoise-shell cat, Dinah's property and the pet of the household, hoisting her up and down in her "fall and tackle." The old thing broke, and poor grimalkin jumped for her life, landed on her feet, as Ellie said, it is true, waged fearful war with Hetty, who caught her and tried to carry her back again, and escaped for that time; only to be severely tried in her feelings, and her fur the next night being rubbed backwards for electric sparks. Only the week before, Ellie had broken the best mirror by putting a lamp too close in order to get a *focus*. After papa came home, an injunction was laid on indoor experiments; what could be accomplished outside was permissible, but a lingering regard for what yet remained whole in the house made such a restriction imperative.

If Ellie was excitable, she was also good-natured to a fault; and Dick's hearty promise of help, and Hetty's co-operation also, soon restored things to a happy equilibrium.

"Well, children, if you won't tease, and will mind every word I say, I'll tell you. Wouldn't you like to go up in a balloon, and sail softly through the air like an argonaut?"

"O Ellie! you will kill me laughing. It isn't an 'argonaut' at all; it's an aeronaut."

"Well, what difference does it make, Dick Adams, I'd like to know, as long as you sail in the air?"

"But where's your balloon, Ellie? How are you going up?"

"Did I say go up? I didn't mean just that: we shall climb up, and then sail off with a *pair of shoots;* and when we want to come down, we shall come down like feathers."

"What do you mean, Ellie? What are 'pair of shoots'? Are they guns?"

"No, indeed, Hetty; you are as bad as Dick! Didn't you hear the class this morning? I saw the picture afterwards, on the board, and it is just like an umbrella; but Mr. Parker said they were *pair of shoots;* any way, it sounded like that; and when people are up in balloons and want to send things down"—

"Cats and the like," broke in Dick.

"Well, they do send cats down that way, and it does'nt hurt a bit: and I saw a picture of a man coming down, and it's ever so much more sensible than your Mr. Ignorance you were telling about, with his wings fastened on with wax. As if a man could be a bird!"

"His name was Icarus," shrieked Dick, "and the wings were all right, if the foolish fellow hadn't flown up to the sun and melted the wax!"

"Come, Dick, don't quarrel again," said Hetty. "I want so much to know about the 'pair of shoots,' and how Ellie is going to make us fly."

"I said they were just like umbrellas, and we must get the largest ones we can find, and climb up over the pig-pen and the cow-house out to the shed; then we can fly down with the umbrellas open, and perhaps"—here Ellie's great gray eyes opened wider and the pupils dilated with her earnestness—"and perhaps, if the wind is strong enough, we shall sail past mamma's sewing-room window, and she will look up, and think it is a roc, or something dreadful, and I shall laugh, and say softly, 'It is only Ellie and Hetty and Dick taking a fly!'"

"That sounds something like. You wait here, girls; I'll get the umbrellas."

Off went Dick, returning in two minutes with mamma's pretty sun-umbrella, papa's silk one with

the ivory handle, and Dinah's "family roof," an immense structure of whalebone and cotton, originally green, now faded, and streaked with blue, black, and yellow, till it looked like one vast bruise; the stick as tough and substantial as old Dinah herself, the handle an immense brass hook that even Squeers might have envied.

"Will these do, little mother? I had to cut quick, for fear Dinah would spy her parasol, as she calls it. I was determined, if you wanted anything in the way of an umbril, you should have 'Ten Acres Enough.'"

"O Dick! Papa won't let you make fun of Dinah's things that way."

"It wasn't I that said it; it was Uncle Will, when he saw her going to church, one Sunday, with this for a sunshade. She never will take the little one we gave her, because if it *should* rain you know!"

"Well, well, Dick, just see here! I'll get up first, then you hand up the umbrellas, and help Hetty; she's no account for a climb."

By dint of scrambling, pushing, pulling and boosting, they all arrived safely at their destination; though Ellie's hat, always hanging by the strings, astonished the pig by descending on his head just as he settled himself for his afternoon nap. The roof of the shed sloped gently, so their footing was firm enough; but it

was a dizzy height for little folks to jump from, with or without parachutes.

"Ellie's captain; give her the big one; you are a girl, Hetty, so you shall have papa's. I'll take the little one. If I should get hurt, it won't matter; boys don't mind bumps."

"How you talk, Dick! As if I brought you and my darling Hetty up here to be hurt. I tell you we are going to fly! Now all open your umbrellas! Hold on tight! Shut your eyes! We'll count one, two, three, and then jump. Now, one! — two! — *three!*"

A whir and a rush. Two little figures still stand erect on the edge of the shed with their "*pair of shoots*" spread, looking earnestly up and around for the fearless air-voyager. If they would see their dear little "argonaut" they must look down. Providential indeed was the borrowing of Aunt Dinah's parasol and the gallantry that assigned it to Ellie. Braver at heart and more thoroughly in earnest than the others, because she believed in her theory as well as in herself, and they only believed in her, — and their umbrellas didn't have hook-handles, — at the fatal "*three*" she jumped. The breeze was strong, but it did not carry her sailing past mamma's window; it capsized the big umbrella, and tipped Ellie into it, still grasping the handle firmly. The ferrule struck

the ground so forcibly that "Ten Acres Enough" shut up on the fearless little aeronaut; and when Dinah arrived, being nearest at hand, and rushing first to the rescue, there was Ellie, safe and sound, but somewhat surprised at the sudden turn of events; her curls in a tangle, cheeks red as roses, a little startled look in her big gray eyes, and an aspect about the lips that might herald smiles or tears, till she looked up and saw Hetty and Dick were safe; then the smile won the victory. She never thought to reproach them for their want of fidelity; she was so thankful that no one but herself got bumped. Dinah was ready to croon over "de darlin', bressed, drefful chile, done gone clean kilt for sartain, dis yere time;" but "de drefful chile" burst into a merry laugh as she shook her curls at the "chilluns" who must climb wearily back to reach terra firma, and shouted, "Any way, you're *up*, and I'm *down!*"

It was fun for the "chilluns," unquestionably, and for this time, at least, they had escaped broken limbs; but Ellie's utter indifference to danger was becoming chronic, spite of the lesson of the winter. Many an anxious hour of thought and talk had it given to both papa and mamma. But the proposed remedies never seemed quite adequate. Ellie's brain was of the most active. Fertile in all expedients, if an idea suggested itself, nothing stood in the way of its fulfilment. It

was the only form of selfishness the child ever manifested, but it was a pretty serious one.

Dr. John encouraged her various outdoor escapades, not only because they amused him intensely, but because he believed that unless the superfluous nervous energy, which gave rise to these doubtful exploits, were allowed to work itself off in comparatively harmless excitement, the after effect would be much more serious. "I tell you, Mrs. Adams, if, at this age, she turns that force to books and study, — and some foolish mothers would let her, — she would be a prodigy, an infant phenomenon, from all which I devoutly say, 'Good Lord, deliver us!' As it is, there's more brain than body. Turn her out to grass! turn her out to grass! Let her romp and play the hoyden all she will; I'll set all the broken bones; but a broken brain is past my healing. I would rather have her sail a dozen times in her 'pair of shoots' than hear of her writing one poem."

"I suppose you are right, doctor. Indeed, *mens sano in mens corpore* is a prime article in my creed; but I never feel quite sure how many of the children I shall find whole and sound when I come home at night, or scarcely whether there will be a roof over our heads. Didn't she coax Hettie to make a Robinson Crusoe hut out of the old summer-house? And didn't they build a fire, and not only destroy the arbor and

the old grapevine, but, except for Dinah and her water-butt, would have had the house itself in flames? To say nothing, doctor, of desiring so much to illustrate what you called a 'header,' in your description of surf-bathing, that she was getting all ready for a headlong plunge into that same water-butt, never realizing that it was easier to get in head foremost than out again. Dinah was only just in time then."

"Well, well," said the good doctor, a little testily, "you who have drawn prizes in the lottery of life are always grumbling. Leave that to us wretched ones for whom only blanks turn up. When Miss Ellie has exhausted your patience, hand her over to me. I'll agree to take her for good and all. Mark my words: she'll make a spoon, or spoil a horn. Meantime make a Nebuchadnezzar of her as fast as possible. Good-morning."

"What a pity it is our good doctor should not have half a dozen curly pates to climb around him and tyrannize over him! I never saw the man with a lot of children that he did not look at them with hungry, eager eyes, as if he wanted them all in his arms. That he and his dear wife are childless is their one cross."

"Yes, there's Bob Weston, one of our clerks, pinching and screwing on eight hundred a year, blissful over number twelve, whose arrival he announced this

morning; while Dr. John, with twice eight thousand a year, has neither chick nor child. No wonder he grumbles about 'a screw loose, a screw loose,' and loves his quaint parable of the round holes and the square pegs, and the square holes and the round pegs, that are chasing each other round the universe and so rarely get fitted."

"But this does not settle the question about Ellie. I do not like to send her away from home, as if it were a punishment; and yet, if she had not Dick and Hetty to co-operate, I really think she would achieve less mischief."

"What do you think of a summer at Kadesh?"

"What, alone?"

"Yes. If grandma's stateliness and Mehitable's cantankerousness can't straighten her out, I don't know what will."

"I did think of sending all three up there for August, but am half afraid to, when I think of Ellie's and Dick's performances for the last six months."

"Better than that. Send Ellie alone for the month of July."

"Impossible! The child would be heartbroken! I could never consent."

"Well, well; we will think it over."

CHAPTER XVII.

INDEPENDENCE DAY.

How mamma, so consistent and steadfast, came to consent to that which seemed impossible, will be quite clear before we have done with Independence day and its "sequellæ," as the doctors call the disagreeable, unexpected things that follow events comparatively simple and harmless in themselves.

In the long ago, schools did not close till the very last of July, sometimes not till early in August, so that Fourth of July, instead of signalling the end of the school year, as it does pretty generally nowadays, was just a bright oasis in a hot, dreary desert of school-days, enjoyed in anticipation and remembrance to an extent that young America of to-day cannot understand. There were no appropriations for children's entertainments in the public halls, neither jugglery, Swiss bell-ringers, nor concerts; but there was always a band on the Common, sometimes a balloon ascension, fire-works, if it did not rain, and unlimited fire-crackers. Torpedoes were not, and pistol and cannon crackers were not; but every boy and girl had a store of square bunches of

Chinese fire-crackers, with no law in the land to forbid their firing them anywhere and everywhere between midnight of the third and midnight of the fourth. It was a day for festivals, for Sunday-school picnics. Who ever heard of any one being allowed an extra picnic day in long ago? But the one feature of the day that, as far as my knowledge goes, has utterly passed away, was the Floral Procession. Who should walk in it, what they should wear, what flowers they would carry, whether a bonnet, a hat, or a wreath were to be worn, whom one would walk with, were serious questions agitating the little body politic at recess, before school, and after school, from the time May day was really past till Fourth of July dawned.

After some hesitation, Mrs. Adams had consented that Hetty and Ellie should both go, provided they kept together, and, when the procession broke up, would remain with Mr. Thaxter, the superintendent, who was to have a little festival at his own beautiful country home in the afternoon, and had promised to look after the girls as if they were his own.

The afternoon before, they were busy as bees, making wreaths and bouquets, and light arches of flowers and leaves, which made no small part of the attractiveness and beauty of the Floral Procession. By daylight of the Fourth, scattered groups of children,

dressed in white, and laden with their offerings, began to fill the streets. Each school had its rallying-point, where all the flowers were brought and distributed impartially among those who were less favored with gardens, or lacked skill and taste to arrange the desired decorations. Each child was requested to make sure of a good breakfast before starting; an essential point, as the walk at best was long, and the waiting often very tedious. Of course there were few children so destitute as not to have at least a few pennies in their pockets to spend on the Common; but that was for luxuries like taffy, ginger-pop, corn-balls, and cocoanuts, with perhaps a slice or so of pineapple and a glass mug of very weak lemonade. We were sure it was lemonade, even if it didn't taste very good, for there was always a piece of lemon-peel floating on top! But for substantials, like honest bread and butter, rolls and sandwich, there was no chance after leaving home.

The chapel was the central station, where, one after another, the various detachments, already reduced to order, and bearing their personal decorations as well as distinctive emblems for their school or town, were assigned their places in the procession. The children walked in pairs, as nearly as possible according to size. Each child had a basket of flowers, a bouquet or wreath, or carried one end of

a flower arch. Sometimes the white dresses were looped and wreathed with flowers also, but that was individual fancy, and had nothing to do with the prescribed order for the day. The heads were usually bare; else of what use the wreaths so carefully constructed? The hat or bonnet was often swung on the arm for later use. A band of music headed the column, and, if that were very long, there was a second band. The streets through which they passed were gayly decorated, windows were crowded, doorsteps were thronged. Whatever other glory there might be in the Fourth of July procession, the floral procession came in for a lion's share. As if white-robed youth, with its innocence and freshness, and the beauty of buds and flowers from field and meadow, garden and grove, had not a charm beyond the trades' union, and the arts and sciences! Well, it was a pretty sight! But the world has grown wiser, assuredly.

A modern young lady of the advanced age of ten or twelve would look down with scorn upon such a toilette as made these children of long ago supremely happy. Clear-starched Swiss muslins, with broad hem and tuck, neither over-skirt, flounce, or furbelow; full bishop sleeves, in a wristband, a narrow thread edging at the neck, ankle-ties of light kid, open-worked stockings, ruffled pantalettes, and blue sash

ribbons about a finger wide. As a great privilege, the girls were allowed to wear their silver filigree chains that mamma had brought them home from Havana. These were long and flexible, but not link chains, — some sort of curious open-work that looked like frost flowers, without any clasps, but long enough to go round the neck two or three times, and hang low in graduated loops in front.

More than one group of spectators noticed the twins, bearing between them a lovely flower arch, with their broad brims, and wreaths hanging from their arms, and the blue ribbons floating in the breeze, and the pretty silver chains glistening in the sunlight.

Where the Floral Procession went, what streets it passed through, and what it saw, and who saw it, cannot be told now; but at the proper time it went to the Common, and broke up into groups of various sizes. There was plenty to see and to do. There was a "fandango," which carried one up to a dizzy height, from which Ellie would certainly have jumped if she had not been securely strapped in. There was the "roundabout," something like the wooden horses that they ride on now, only the patrons sat on seats, half a dozen in a group, and were ground round by a man with a crank. There were all sorts of shows, — big hand-organs, with marmots and white mice; trained monkeys and learned canaries; a dancing bear which

looked very unhappy, and as if it would much rather go to sleep than climb a pole. There were candy-stands and peanut-stands; but the candy was rather sticky, and the peanuts were musty, as though they had been left over from the year before. The most attractive stand to Ellie's eyes, however, was the lobster-man's. "Such beautiful red lobsters! Mamma is so fond of lobster-salad too! Do you see how handsome those lobsters are, Hetty? Did you ever see such red ones? I wish I could carry one home to mamma!" Every time the girls came in sight of the lobster-man, these exclamations were heard from Ellie, while Hetty preserved a discreet silence. Again Ellie found herself a little nearer than before; while Mr. Thaxter, who had heroically endured the day, and treated the girls to every entertainment that offered, was in busy conference with some city official, utterly ignorant of the traffic going on at his elbow.

"See, Hetty, if I had five cents more, I could buy that beauty. Just see his claws! Mamma would like it so much! Don't you think you have got five cents left? I wish I hadn't bought that sugar lemon! Quick, quick, Hetty! haven't you got five cents?"

"Ye-e-e-s," reluctantly said Hetty, who privately thought strawberries or a cocoa-nut would be nicer.

"All right. We'll take it, mister: the big one,

please." And Ellie eagerly poured forth her store of pennies, to which, with only a pretty good grace, Hetty added her mite.

How the great red lobster escaped Mr. Thaxter's eyes no one can guess; but he was walking rapidly in front of them, calling out for them to hurry, having caught a glimpse of his coachman and horses near the mall. Dick was already there on the box, and Mr. Thaxter, remembering some final order for the festival, said hastily, "Get in, children, and wait for me: I came near forgetting the bonbons."

So it happened that Ellie was able, by dint of lugging and tugging, to get her lobster into the carriage. She would gladly have held it in her lap, but Hetty remonstrated, and said she didn't like the smell, and was sure it would be cooler in the bottom of the carriage; so there it was snugly stowed away at Ellie's feet, when Mr. Thaxter returned laden with gay French boxes and square parcels smelling deliciously of winter-green, peppermint, and sassafras, — all of which, perhaps, prevented Mr. Thaxter from being immediately aware of the unwonted occupant of his elegant carriage. Pretty soon he began to sniff suspiciously.

"John, have you been to market?"

"O, no, sir! Why, sir, in the kerridge, sir? O, no, sir."

"Um, um! You're not carrying anything home to your wife, John?"

"O, no, sir! Why, sir, my wife, sir, has gone home, sir, to see her folks, sir!"

"Very well, John. I must speak to the street commissioners. There is something wrong; a very ancient and fishlike smell. You are sure, John, the girls did not bring up any trumpery from the beach, yesterday, that got left in the box? eh, John?"

"O, no, sir! no, sir! Washed it all out, sir, this morning, sir! If I had not, sir, the dirt on itself, sir, would denote, sir!"

"Very well, John. It is very strange what can cause such a fishy smell. It must be those manhaden-oil works. A nuisance, a nuisance!"

It never once occurred to Ellie that it was her lobster that caused the commotion. Indeed, by the time they reached Thaxter Hill, where the festival was to be held, she had forgotten her precious possession in the unexpected beauty of the place and its gay decorations. Flags and streamers, with bunting in profusion; pretty tents pitched on the lawn; a hurdle-race course, marked out with tiny flags; an observatory and a mounted telescope; aviaries and conservatories; and a glimpse of a pond through the trees; while strains of music and groups of gayly dressed children and ladies made it seem like a fête in a story-book. She was in a

dream at once. She scarcely heard Mr. Thaxter when he said, "Now, Miss Ellie, here is your sister, fresh as a posy;" extending his arms to lift her also to the piazza, where Hetty, after a little shake, stood almost as immaculate as when she started from home six hours before. A second call brought the child back from dreamland to even lovelier reality. But what was the matter? What was she stopping for?

"What have you lost, Ellie? Here's your gloves and your hat."

"I haven't lost anything. I only want — I'm trying to get — it's my lobster, please, for mamma!"

By this time the head and voice, which had suffered eclipse, stooping down for the unmanageable red treasure, came to the surface, accompanied by flushed cheeks, a strong tendency to tears, an immense lobster in her arms, and a dress stained and tumbled to a degree only possible for Ellie Adams.

"Whew!" said Mr. Thaxter, with a long, low whistle; "manhaden-oil works indeed!"

Hetty looked uncomfortable, while Dick screamed with laughter, and Ellie, unable to control herself any longer, burst into tears of vexation and disappointment as well as of mortification; still clinging to her lobster, though its increasing unsavoriness was convincing even her that, fond as mamma was of lobsters, this one might not be to her taste.

Before the crowd of strange children on the lawn had come near enough to know the cause of the commotion, Mr. Thaxter had handed the wretched lobster to John, with charge to bury it where its further decomposition could continue without annoyance to any one, and dear, kind-hearted Mrs. Thaxter had taken the unhappy little girl to her own room, bidding Dick and Hetty follow, for even Master Dick stood in need of a little freshening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUDIGER.

"You walked in the Floral Procession, dears, didn't you?"

"Yes ma'am," said Hetty; for Ellie had not yet done with her sobbing and crying, as energetic a performance always as her fun and frolic.

"I saw you from Mr. Baldwin's. You had a floral arch. I was sure I could not be mistaken. Your mamma and I were old friends at school, when we were no bigger than you are now."

Master Dick, meantime, was making a great flourish with soap and water and hair-brushes, professing himself, —

"Good as new
And better too."

"Very well, Dick; I think you look very nice. You can go down the way we came. You will find plenty of lads and lassies on the lawn; join in their games, and enjoy yourself all you can. I am going to stay here a little while with your sisters."

Nothing loath, Dick departed.

"Now," continued Mrs. Thaxter, "you must be

very tired. We shall have a collation at five o'clock, and afterwards a dance on the green, and fire-works in the evening. I want you to feel bright and fresh for all that, so I am going to do just the same as if you were my little girlies."

Ellie had ceased sobbing under the influence of the gentle voice and the arm lovingly encircling her.

"I am going to take your dresses off, give you a nice, cool bath, and let you have a nap for an hour at least. Now, see how quickly you will undress. I shall be back in five minutes."

It seemed less than that, when the kind lady appeared, with two dainty glass tumblers heaped with pink ice-cream and a plate of delicate milk biscuit.

"Eat these, dears, while I get the bath ready."

"It seems just like mamma, Hetty, doesn't it?" said Ellie, as, refreshed by the cool sponging, in thin night-dresses which Mrs. Thaxter brought them, they lay on the pretty French bed in the shaded room, with wide-open eyes and the remembrance of her loving kiss.

"Yes, dear Ellie. If only your dress wasn't so dirty and tumbled."

"Never mind, Hetty; it wouldn't have been so bad but for the old lobster. If it looks too awful, — I guess it will smell, any way, — I won't go down stairs

at all. I will look at you all from the window, like a lady in a balcony."

So they talked themselves to sleep, and never knew that Mrs. Thaxter stole softly in, and took the forlorn little dress and the sorry little stockings, and even Hetty's muslin too, which was a little rumpled, and might be the better for a hot iron; so that, when the clock struck four, and their four eyes opened at the same moment, hanging over the back of the lounge, where they had thrown their clothes an hour before, were two dainty little muslin dresses as fresh as soap and starch could make them, clean stockings too, and not a hint of lobster anywhere about them. I think Ellie felt like saying her prayers truly then, just for very thankfulness.

"I think Mrs. Thaxter is the goodest, loveliest person in the whole world, — next to mamma, of course!"

"Indeed she is. She is better than the fairy I dreamed of, who was going to give you a silver-spangled dress."

"I like my muslin a thousand times better, now it's clean, than any fairy dress even in Alcmenahrah's kingdom."

While their tongues were busy, their fingers were no less busy, with loving sisterly aid each to the other; so that when Mrs. Thaxter came to wake her

little guests, she found them fresh and smiling as June roses, ready for more happiness. Their grateful looks and hearty kisses were more eloquent than a volume of words. Indeed, of all the grand things provided for the festival that day,—all that almost boundless wealth and rare taste and discretion had offered to their guests,—no one thing had given purer pleasure in doing or receiving than this simple act of a kindly heart, which turned sorrow and mortification into joy and thanksgiving. It was not much indeed to order the simple dresses laundered, in a great establishment like Mrs. Thaxter's; but it was the loving kindness and the tender thought of one who had not forgotten that the griefs of childhood are keener, if less lasting, than those of womanhood, which gave the act its beauty and worth.

Rested and refreshed, happy and clean, with light hearts, the little girls joined the young party who made the lawn and the grove echo again with their merriment. It was before the days of croquet and "Aunt Sally," but there were merry out-door sports for all that. There was battledore and shuttlecock, and a game that ought not to have fallen into disuse, called "graces;" there were swings and flies, and a circular railway, hoops and jumping-ropes for the little folks, and boats and ponies for those who were big enough to guide them. The hurdle-races were

over, and Dick, who was a capital runner, had won a prize, a pretty silk flag, which he flourished triumphantly.

After the collation, there was to be an archery contest for the older people, with a silver arrow for a prize. So, when the bell struck, every one without delay assembled in the great tent, where were bountifully laden tables, with ice-creams and sherbets, fruits, cakes, and sandwiches, to say nothing of a huge pyramid of bonbons, snappers, and cockles, and every animal that ever was or wasn't in Noah's ark in red or white or yellow barley candy. To the children's great delight it was not only considered proper to put candy and bonbons in one's pockets, but every one was expected to, in order to be in time for the archery and enjoy the sugar-plums too.

The archery was quite new to our little folks, but it was a fashionable game just then, and both ladies and gentlemen prided themselves on their skill in target-shooting. The target itself was gay with gold and red and white concentric circles; the arrows were white and slender, the bows had knots of ribbon, and the archers, especially the ladies, were many of them dressed quite picturesquely. They took turns in shooting, each one shooting a "pair of ar rows," which Ellie, after considerable puzzling, dis covered meant three arrows and not two.

By the time the prize had been won and awarded, it was so nearly dark that there was only time for a merry contra-dance on the lawn before the fire-works began. Ellie watched the lighting of the Chinese lanterns with great interest, and thought there could not be anything in the world more beautiful, unless it were the "real Chinese feast of lanterns."

As everything improves, and this age is ahead of the last, I suppose fire-works now are better than those of long ago; but they don't look so bright or so big, the red isn't half so red, nor the green half so green. I'm sure no modern Catherine wheels or serpents or rockets are as superb as those on Thaxter's Hill in the long ago. Perhaps we lost something in changing the rose-colored spectacles of childhood for the gold-rimmed ones of mature years. Well, let us be glad that memory remains.

> "Bliss in possession will not last,
> Remembered joys are never past,
> At once the fountain, stream, and sea,
> They were, they are, they yet shall be."

The clock had struck nine; there was only one short hour more, and it seemed possible, if not probable, that Ellie would finish the glorious Fourth without any further mishap. But who was to count on that child, so fertile in expedients? She had resolved firmly "to be

good," and had kept close to Hetty, both full of happiness almost to satiety. In an evil hour she wondered how the house, and the grounds, and the gay people, and the colored lights would look from the grove by the pond, and whether the fire-works would be reflected in the water. Hetty's weakness was never to say no quite firmly enough; so when Ellie suggested going to the little bridge to see the effect, though Hetty said, "O, no, dear," two or three times, at last, though she *said* "No," she *did* yes, — not unlike a certain one of whom we read in Scripture.

Well would it have been for Ellie had she been content with what she went for. Had she been satisfied with the magical effects of colored lights reflected in the still, quiet lake, and the scene, so like an enchanted castle, of the great house, illuminated from top to bottom, and the long lines of fantastic lanterns and colored globes that swung in mid-air. But just outside of a little Chinese pagoda, on the shore of the lake, where ordinarily he kept housed at night, was a great white swan, which, disturbed by the unusual brightness and bustle, was preparing for an evening sail. Close at hand was a little fanciful shell of a boat, with streamers and pennants still flying.

"Hetty, Hetty! the swan and the boat and the silver chain! I'm going to play Rudiger!"

In vain Hetty pleaded; the naughty, wilful child

was possessed with the idea of Rudiger. She would never have another such chance. Unwinding her silver chain from her neck as she ran, she leaped into the boat, flung the chain over the neck of the swan, which, affrighted, sailed swiftly towards the middle of the pond, bearing the little boat and the child, who, with eager eyes and floating hair, grasped the silver chain, and felt in very truth as if she were that knight of old, and wished mamma was there to see and sing, —

"So, as they strayed, a swan they saw
Sail stately up, and strong;
And by a silver chain she drew
A little boat along,

"Whose streamer to the gentle breeze
Long floating fluttered light,
Beneath whose crimson canopy
There lay reclined a knight.

"With arching crest and swelling breast,
On sailed the stately swan,
And lightly up the parting tide
The little boat came on.

"And onward to the shore they drew,
And" —

But Ellie got no further. The wonder was that the unaccustomed courser had not capsized the boat before, in its rush and fright. It was sure to come sooner or

RUDIGER.

later, and it was sooner now. In an instant the boat was upside down, the swan sailing angrily away with a fragment of Ellie's silver chain in its bill, while the child had disappeared.

Hetty's shrieks brought every one in haste to the pond; no one understood what had happened, or how.

"Where?" shouted Mr. Thaxter, throwing off coat and shoes as he ran.

"Where the light shines by the island," cried Hetty. "O Ellie, Ellie! I ought not to have let you!"

They were anxious minutes — minutes that seemed like hours — before Mr. Thaxter brought to shore the insensible child, whose little hands still grasped the broken silver chain. He carried her to Mrs. Thaxter's room. No time was lost in applying restoratives, hot flannels and rubbing; while Dick, bareback, on the fastest horse in the stables, was off for Dr. John. She had given signs of life before he arrived, but was still unconscious; and even when she opened her eyes and spoke, she was wandering and soon delirious.

"I shall stay with the child till her mother comes," said the physician. "She must not be moved. Hetty and Dick had better go home with Mr. Thaxter. Tell Mrs. Adams, Ellie has fallen into the water, but is alive, and I am here."

An hour later found mamma by Ellie's bedside; but the child did not know her. All her talk was of

Rudiger, the swan, and the boat, and the silver chain, which she still clung to; any attempt to take it away increasing her wildness and agitation.

The delirium was followed by great nervous prostration and a low fever, during which Dr. John would not consent to her removal; and Mr. and Mrs. Thaxter placed the whole establishment at Mrs. Adams's commands. It would have been a burden to accept such courtesy from any but old lifelong friends. As it was, Mrs. Adams had her hands full at home; for measles had appeared among the little folks. Hetty and Dick had already been exposed, so it was useless to send them away; but Dr. John said he would not answer for the consequences, if Ellie should take the measles in her present condition. Therefore she was virtually cut off from home and all intercourse with its inmates, though she had a daily bulletin through the doctor, who gave her more moral doses than physical ones.

One morning she was well enough to walk a little distance in the garden, and was resting from the fatigue of an invalid's first exertion, right in sight of the scene of her foolish and so nearly fatal exploit. While she was recalling it all and hoping that she never would need another such lesson, and counting the days that must pass before Dr. John would say she might go home, the good doctor made his appearance.

"Good-morning, Miss Ellie; this is a step in the right direction."

"Have you any news from home?"

"News? Heaps of news! All as comfortable and cross as possible. Sure sign of getting well. But Dick is down this morning; little ones picking up; Hetty's turn is yet to come, and perhaps Dinah's! But I have really some news for you."

"What is it? You always tease me."

"I'm going to run away with you!"

"Run away with me? Home do you mean?"

"No, indeed. I'm going to Montclare next week, by the river road, in my buggy. I'm going to take you to Kadesh. We shall be a week on the road. I've business in half a dozen river towns; shall bring Aunt Margaret back, and leave you with Madame Peyton."

There was nothing to be said, and Ellie knew it. Whoever dealt with Dr. John had to accept his situations and abide by his edicts.

CHAPTER XIX.

TO KADESH.

And so it happened that mamma consented to that which she had said was impossible. Ellie was to go to Kadesh, without mamma or Hetty or Dick: not exactly as punishment, but certainly as a consequence and result of her folly and wilfulness. If she cried a little, softly to herself, it was only natural; and the fact that she cried softly, and made no one else uncomfortable, was surely a great gain; really a ground for hoping that this last severe lesson was to bear good fruit in due season.

Grandma was formally notified by letter. Ellie's trunk was to go by stage; while the journey itself was to be taken, as Dr. John had said, in his buggy, by slow and easy stages; partly because it was the doctor's favorite way of travelling and enjoying his holiday; partly because he had some business in various places, more easily attended to in person than by letter; and partly, too, because the journey would be less fatiguing to the little convalescent; and though our wise doctor did not reckon this aloud among the advantages, he would have a chance for a good many

quiet talks with Miss Ellie, when he hoped, through her affectionate, loving heart, to be able to hold up the mirror of what she was, and show by contrast what she might be.

Our good doctor believed firmly in childhood and child-life. He had a detestation of priggish, Sunday-school-book children. He liked noise and rumpus and riot, fun, frolic, and freedom; a spice of mischief, even, was too much akin to his own natural disposition not to find ready sympathy and co-operation: but selfishness, of which heedlessness is only one form, was foreign indeed to his heart and life; and he did not mean that his pet, little heedless Ellie, should allow the pardonable fault of childhood to confirm into the grave sin of girlhood, with perhaps fatal consequences to herself or to those dear to her.

But Ellie never dreamed of sugared pills or siruped doses, either moral, spiritual, or physical. The latter she certainly did not get; and as for the former, I don't think she knew she was taking them at the time, though in after years she often remembered that journey up the valley of the Connecticut, and was wont to say that "If she was anybody's good daughter, sister, wife, and mother, she owed it to Dr. John." Not that she became at once a full-fledged angel; not that she was not careless, mischievous,

forgetful, often and often. The Hill of Difficulty is only climbed step by step; the process is slow and painful. But she made a start in that summer journey; and spite of stumbling, falling, and backsliding, by the grace of God she kept her face to the light, though shadows were round her, and her feet faltered and strayed often from the true path. The children who cluster round her to-day, made happy in the brightness and serenity of her heart and life, find it hard to believe that mamma was ever wilful, careless, and disobedient, and learned only by sad experience the beauty, sweetness, and wisdom of the secret of happiness, — "not to thyself."

O, those summer mornings and evenings! Are there any dawns and sunsets so beautiful as those which met Ellie's eyes among the Berkshire hills? Our travellers were very wise, and were always astir with the birds; a good breakfast, arranged for, in detail, the night before, always received good attention. (Dr. John believed in eating and drinking.) Sunrise usually found them a mile or two on their way, enjoying the fresh miracle of each new day's birth. It was a fascination of which Ellie never wearied, to watch for the light on the mountains, when the valley was in shadow, and to see the brightness creep down and the mist roll up and float away, while the birds and flowers and every

living creature seemed to lift up their heads and voices in glad thanksgiving.

By ten o'clock, or half-past, at the latest, they would reach some nooning, previously selected. Ellie had a bowl of bread and milk, and went to bed, — at first rather reluctantly; but Dr. John was autocrat, and Ellie knew better than to argue or rebel, though she was always sure she should not sleep a wink, notwithstanding which she always did, and soundly too, for at least three or four hours, never hearing the gong or the horn or whatever called people to their twelve-o'clock dinner, — a meal often of a type that the doctor preferred his little patient should escape.

By three o'clock, if the little girl were not awake, she was so near it that a tap on the door was enough; and by the time she was dressed and ready for her dinner, it was ready for her. This, too, was always of the doctor's planning, for he had a golden way of softening obdurate landladies and hard-hearted cooks. The dinner for two, in a shady corner of the sitting-room, if there were no big tree back of the house to sit under, was a very different affair from the tavern dinner, of which Ellie was happily ignorant. Baked potatoes, bursting their jackets in their mealy plenitude; golden cream to drown them in, with a sprinkle of salt; delicate, broiled chicken or trout of the

doctor's catching (he could always coax a fish to bite at high noon, if he would), and a saucer of crimson raspberries for dessert, made a dinner for a queen, thought Ellie. I think she was about right, too.

From four to eight brought them another good bit on the way; with all the beauty of summer won, and all the heat and weariness lost, by the morning and evening travel and the noon siesta.

Sometimes they would stop and gather berries by the wayside; sometimes little boys and girls offered them little birch-bark baskets full of shining blackberries and thimbleberries; sometimes, in a seductive woodland nook, a shy little brook said, "Trout," so plainly that Dr. John could not say, "No." On these occasions he would give Black Eagle liberty to browse; pile up cushions and shawls for the little girl, and then, and then only indulge her in a book, — "the only way he was sure of quiet." Sly doctor! Just when Ellie was deepest among Houyhnhnms, Liliputs, or Brobdignags, the skilful fisherman would make his appearance with a string of speckled beauties and a basket of wet moss to keep them fresh and cool for supper or breakfast, as might be.

Much of the time, as they turned northward, the road lay by the river, through such valleys as I truly believe are nowhere else to be found on this green earth. Ripening grain and hay fields filled the air

with sweetness and the landscape with color; while after sunset came a beauty which may be suggested elsewhere, but which I never saw equalled. The fire-flies swarmed by thousands, not only among the trees and bushes, but in the fields of wheat and corn, till the stars in the blue firmament above seemed only the reflection of the glancing, dancing lights below. At every step in the grassy wood, road, and among the lanes, they rose beneath the horse's feet; they glittered above, below, on either side, defining the very form of the trees and the course of the river with their brilliancy and numbers. It was a spectacle for fairy-land. Such cosey talks as Ellie and the doctor had; such stories of travel in foreign lands; such jokes and adventures of his boyhood; such blithe, merry songs; such glorious recitations from Walter Scott, the real outdoor poet after all, were ready for Ellie when she was ready for them, that to be homesick never occurred to her.

No lover ever wooed a coy mistress with more earnest purpose than Dr. John our Ellie; and to good purpose, for her love and confidence in him became second only to her love for and confidence in mamma. I shall not tell you how he won her child heart, nor by what sad chapter of his own life he gave her a vision of hers; but it was done, the ground was fallow, the good seed was sown, and in due time it bore fruit an hundred-fold.

They drove into Kadesh at sunset. The sun had really vanished behind the Green Mountain hills long before; but on the summit of Kadesh hills he yet lingered, though twilight was falling in the valley, and Ascutney loomed dark against a golden background, while weird, fantastic cloud-shapes, like Ossian's giants, seemed gathering for a conflict, and the river was hid from sight by the fog which in August is a pretty sure factor in river-side life. Madam Peyton's house, however, indeed the best part of the pretty village of Kadesh, was on the second plateau, tending towards the hills, and escaped the dampness of the lower village.

Grandma was at the door, of course, and Aunt Margaret. Grandpa's arm-chair was under the great elm-tree, that might have sheltered a company of soldiers, but he heard the light carriage-wheels first of all, and shouted joyously, "She's come, our darling little Ellie!" Then there was kissing and hugging enough indeed. Dr. John's welcome was no less cordial. Tim was ready to take the horse, and supper was ready to be taken by the travellers. How they talked and laughed and ate! Grandma had to have the doctor's version of Ellie's mishap. Then grandpa insisted upon Ellie's version, and she had to recite the whole of Rudiger to make it clear.

"O, that mischievous 'Wonder Book!'" said the

doctor. "If Monk Lewis or Robert Southey either of them were alive now, I think I would like to thrash them a little."

"Perhaps," said Madame Peyton, "a wiser thing would be to burn the book, as they used to burn heretical works, in the public square."

"O grandma! That would not do any good, for I know it all by heart; but I won't let Reno give it to me for my very own if you think I ought not to have it, for a punishment you know."

"The mischief is done, I fear," quoth Dr. John; "for the rest, we must try to get plenty of common-sense in, by way of antidote."

"Miss Margaret, are you ready to go back with me to-morrow or next day, at furthest?"

"Yes, quite ready, as far as I am concerned, to go to-morrow; but, if you can give me a day to settle Ellie before I go, I shall be glad."

"All right. I'm going to Montclare to-morrow morning, and will come back for you. We must make a short trip going home, we dawdled so coming up; eh, Miss Ellie?"

"O, it was splendid, Aunt Margaret. You must make Dr. John tell you stories the way he did me. He said all 'Marmion,' too, and 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel;' and he sang 'Men of Harlech' and 'Macgregor' and 'Hieland Laddie'" —

"There, there, Ellie! That will do. You will frighten Miss Margaret so she won't go with me, and I shall have to drive home alone."

"No fear of that; her account is enchanting. But I think, little girl, you are neglecting your hightop sweetings; they are longing to be eaten; and here is a pitcher of Mehitable's thickest, yellowest cream!"

After supper, Ellie was quite willing to go up stairs with Aunt Margaret, whose room, with the big, high, four-post bedstead and quaint chintz bed-curtains and tester, she was to share to-night. It was a cavern of a room to go into in the dark, with huge, shadowy presses and wardrobes, and chests of drawers, and mirrors draped in chintz, like the window-curtains and bed-curtains. It was well enough to sleep there with Aunt Margaret, but Ellie was glad to know she was to have a little room down stairs, next to grandma's, for herself.

There were a thousand questions to ask and to answer while Ellie was undressing, and almost as many more down stairs with the doctor, who was giving pretty positive directions about the child. He insisted she would be better off with Tim and Mehitable, making hay and butter, or going berrying with the farmer's daughters, than attending Madame Peyton's sewing circles and literary clubs.

"I don't believe she will ever hurt herself sewing,

but you are all too old and wise. I know she understands you and talks intelligently and charmingly. I wish she didn't. I don't want her to touch a book this summer, or do or say a wise thing, or hear one, either, if she can help it. Let her forget she knows anything. Let her browse. She can't come to much harm with Mehitable round. She must come back in the fall plump and rosy, or Mrs. Adams will never forgive me for carrying my point. By the way, you need not tell her just yet, — Ellie, I mean, — but in September, I think, Hetty and Dick will be well enough to come up for their holiday, and stay till October at least. A month alone will do her no harm."

The next morning, early, while waiting for breakfast, Aunt Margaret took Ellie in her lap, and talked to her gravely and tenderly, of home and mamma and all the dear ones. Then she said something to the little girl that made her open her great gray eyes wider than ever.

"Now, Ellie, I want to say something about grandma, which perhaps you will not quite understand, but which I shall try to make plain to you. I think I should never have understood it quite as I do now, if I had not been with her alone for the last five months. You have never been with her except at the Cedars, with the home life and atmosphere which

belongs to it, or with a merry party here, when demonstrations of affection were so general and constant that even Madame Peyton yielded to the influence and let her naturally warm heart express itself as others did; but such exhibitions are foreign to her nature, or, rather, I would say, to the habit of her life, which has been one of form and conventionality rather than of freedom. She is very much respected, the whole country round, beloved too; but with the love is mingled a certain amount of reverence, almost awe, which she rather enjoys. She is Lady of the Land, and regarded as a superior person altogether, as she certainly is both by birth and education. Now that grandpa is growing daily more infirm, she seems to feel it necessary to be dignified and stately for both. She loves you just as much as ever, but she is very much interested in her various societies. There is to be a convention this month, when several of the clergy will be her guests. She will have very little time to give to you, and, as is her way when she is absorbed in thought, may seem very cold and indifferent in her manner."

"Won't she kiss me, and love me ever?"

"O, yes, dear. You must always remember to kiss her for good-morning and good-night. She would feel hurt if you did not. But she is 'on the heights' just now, and childhood seems very far away."

I am not quite sure that Aunt Margaret did the wisest thing in the world, in putting Ellie so much on her guard; though she really believed she was making it easier for her. Left to herself, the child, in her own impetuous fashion, would have stormed the citadel, without, it may be, ever realizing that the draw-bridge was up, and the portcullis down; as it was, she was shy and reserved where she had always been impulsive and affectionate; and Madame Peyton hardly noticed the change, so absorbed was she just then in preparing for the convention; feeling, too, that she was obeying Dr. John literally, in leaving the child with Mehitable and Tim, and locking the bookcase. With what result we shall see.

CHAPTER XX.

DAT TADDEUS.

"O DEAR, what shall I do? I just wish Hetty was here, or even Dick, though he is such a torment!"

Poor little Ellie! A whole week at Grandma Peyton's had exhausted the endless stock of fun and adventure she was so sure of finding in Kadesh. To be there alone was quite another thing from summer vacation with Hetty and Dick and Uncle Will. Grandpa was quite blind now, and so old he wanted to sleep almost all the time, and must not be disturbed Grandma was very stately, with her snowy caps and snowier curls, her thick black silk and lace ruffles; but somehow Ellie felt as if she cared more for her foreign correspondence and the Blue Stocking Club, than for little girls. Any way, she didn't understand them at all, that Ellie was sure of. Ellie's mamma was not her own child, and Madame Peyton had never known how sweet a thing it is to pet and cuddle and love a tumbled-frocked, tangled-curled little girlie of her own; if she had, she would have understood the wistful, longing looks with which poor homesick little Ellie greeted her, with her good-morning and good-

evening kiss. It was all so cold and cheerless and proper, when Ellie wanted so much to throw her arms round her grandmother's neck and hug and be hugged, squeeze and be squeezed, as Hetty and the boys were doing at home, with mamma and papa and dear old Dinah. There was Mehitable Jane Johnson, who reigned in the kitchen, to be sure, but she was tall, angular, and fierce, with her scanty gray locks twisted into a tight little button on the top of her head. Ignorant and forlorn to the last degree would have been the child who should look to her for endearment. If cleanliness is next to godliness, Mehitable was a long way on the heavenly road; she was always "just washed up," and the fresh flavor of soap that attached itself to her premises, as well as to her person, would have been a trusty landmark if Egyptian darkness had prevailed throughout the region.

"Lud sakes, child, what air ye mopin' for neow, I'd like to know! Here, don't ye go trackin' my floor ag'in; I've jest got washed up from yer medder muck and the flower mess ye brought in. What possessed ye, I'd like to know? Down that there swamp! Ye might ha' gone clean through to the bottom, if Tim hadn't heerd ye yell, and hauled ye acout. Any way, yer shoes air half-way to Chany by this time!"

"I guess, Mehitable, I shouldn't have got *clean*

through, any way; judging by the distance I really went and the amount of mud Tim put down on the floor with me, when he brought me home! It was the lovely scarlet cardinal-flowers I wanted: any way, I held on to them tight, and you can't say they don't look pretty in the old brown pitcher with the smoke-plant. They're just like streaks of fire."

"Waal, ye're right enough both ways: if ye'd follered yer shoes clean through to Chany ye'd both ha' been dirty enough by the time ye got there, and them cardinals *are* kind o' fiery and pooty too."

"O Mehitable! can't you tell me something I can do? I am so tired of being alone! Grandma says I mustn't go out of the garden to-day: indeed I can't till mamma sends me some new shoes. Can't I hunt for eggs?"

"Elizabeth Adams! There, didn't Madame Peyton say she wouldn't hev ye climbin' the wood-pile and pokin' round the barn-chamber? Didn't ye hev enough yesterday tumblin' off the top with yer clean dress and yer new apron full of eggs, to say nothin' of breakin' up old Grizzletop's nest, that would ha' hatched out, next week, fifteen as likely chickens as we should ha' had for Thanksgiving! *And* the muss ye made of yer white dress and silk apron! No, ye don't hunt no eggs to-day!"

"Please let me churn, then? I won't upset the churn

igain. I was making believe it was a ship on fire, and we had to work the pumps ; and I turned too hard and fast. You know I was real sorry when it tipped over and the cream spilled out on the cellar-floor."

"'Real sorry' don't pick up spilt cream or sp'iled butter. I guess I've had enough of yer churnin'. Tell ye what ye may do: Tim's picked the peas, and f ye'll shell 'em clean, and not put the peas in the pod-basket, I guess I'll give ye a book to read 'll keep ye quiet one while."

"A book ! a book ! O Mehitable ! I haven't read a book since I came here. Mamma wouldn't put any in my trunk, because Dr. John said my eyes were too big, and I was too white and wise. I don't know what he meant, but papa said I was to '*go to grass*' for a while and grandma was to lock up the bookcase. Do you think I may read it ?"

"Of course, child. D'ye think I'd give ye anything would hurt ye ? It's my book I've had ever since I was a gal no bigger'n you ; that and my Westminster *and* the Bible of course air all my libr'y. Ye can sit down on the front doorstep ; that's gone to grass any how. I told Tim this mornin' he jest better fetch his scythes round 'fore Sunday, or he'd ketch it sure."

Pea-shelling was good fun anyway, without the prospective bribe of a book ; but to deserve the treasure,

Ellie devoted all her thoughts to the peas, and the just distribution of peas to the pan and pods to the basket; with a scattering assortment of each on the floor, to be sure; but they were "clean" dirt, however, even in Mehitable's eyes, who grunted satisfactorily, and proceeded to keep her part of the agreement.

O happy hour of perfect, unalloyed delight, possible only to childhood! Ellie was a passionate book-devourer; mere print had a fascination for her. It was a family legend, better founded than some traditions, that, debarred from school-books and story-books, Ellie had been discovered one day, after a prolonged search, flat on the floor in the attic poring over a musty ship's calendar! Now for a week she had not opened a book. Think of having "Thaddeus of Warsaw" in three pudgy, brown volumes, much the worse for wear, placed in her hands, without any conscience sting either about the reading! because Grandma Peyton when she went to Woodstock told her to mind Mehitable.

No more weary homesickness; no more moping; no more asking, "What shall I do?" no more scrapes! Mehitable blessed her lucky thought that so easily rid her of trouble and care; and Ellie! Will there ever come any more hours like those, to the little girl seated on the broad, low step before the porch of the great, old-fashioned house?

The summer air, fragrant with roses and honeysuckle, that with the ivy and woodbine contested the glory of covering the gray stone-wall, and musical with the whir of the grasshoppers and the hum of the bees; the sweet, warm stillness of a day in June; ten years old, and the first romance! Well for her it was good, pure Jane Porter's book, and not some that came before and after! Reluctantly she left it for dinner and supper; more reluctantly still for bedtime; only consoled by taking the precious volumes to bed, to wake at daylight, and weep again over the sorrows and misfortunes of Thaddeus. The noble, the glorious, the injured! How she adored and envied Miss Beaufort and Lady Tinemouth; how she hated Diana and Miss Euphemia; how her heart throbbed at the thought of the good King Stanislaus; with what vengeance she recalled the Prussians and the cruel Cossacks! "The Battle of Prague!" A new glory attached itself to the very name! She would ask mamma to let her learn it when she went home; she wouldn't grumble once about the tedious practice-hour.

It was the second morning that Ellie had passed in this unreal world; she was in a state when nothing would have surprised her; even a message from the king or a summons from Thaddeus himself, in prison. A shadow deeper than the flickering shade from the elm-tree fell athwart her book. She raised her head,

and looked out of her great, dreamy gray eyes at a strange figure that stood, gaunt and silent, in the garden-path. A slouched hat that would have disgraced a scarecrow of average sensibility half concealed a huge green patch over one eye, and didn't at all conceal a very red nose; long black hair and beard, both ragged and unkempt; a coat of many colors that might have been Joseph's, and have defied the elements ever since, hung with dangling sleeves from one shoulder, disclosing an exceedingly dirty shirt, closed at the throat with a wisp of a yellow handkerchief; a red velveteen vest, guiltless of buttons; and pantaloons that might have formed part of the wardrobe of that famous Irish gentleman, —

"Whose vintilation garments through
The wind most beautifully blew;"

a crooked stick over his shoulder, sustaining a small, dirty bundle; bare feet, that looked as though the owner had come through the "medder muck;" and a regular Irishman's *dudeen* in his mouth, completed the picture. The new-comer looked at Ellie, and Ellie looked at him.

"Gib me someting to eat. Me hungry."

Ellie silently handed him her bowl of bread and milk, which she had brought out for her lunch, and which stood forgotten and untouched by her side.

The man devoured it eagerly. When he had drained the last drop he said fiercely, "More! Meat!"

There was an air of authority that Ellie never thought of questioning. She laid her precious book down, and went into the kitchen to find Mehitable, who was not there however. It was the custom of the house to give food to all who asked, and Ellie took from the pantry a huge slice of beef and some bread and cheese. When she returned, the man was turning over the leaves of "Thaddeus" with an approving smile. He accepted graciously the bread and cheese and meat, devouring them and the book simultaneously; stopping occasionally to cross-question Ellie about the book and her admiration of the hero. Her enthusiasm knew no bounds, when the dirty foreigner, who immediately became glorified in her eyes, assured her he too was from Warsaw and knew the "King of Proosia" well.

"Yes," said he, "I fought in the battle of Prague, shared my tent with General Butznou!"

Her face kindled with enthusiasm, her eyes grew moist with sympathy, as her vivid imagination painted the scenes he must have witnessed. His invention became more daring, his eloquence irresistible. When he quoted, in the very words of Thaddeus, though in somewhat broken English, and with the most extravagant gestures, —

"So driven, O Poland! from thy ravaged plains,
So mourning o'er thy sad but loved remains,
A houseless wretch, *I* wandered through the world,
From friends, from grandeur, and from glory hurled!"

how could she question even his sublime audacity, when he added, "You veeps? It is for me! Behold me. *I* am dat Taddeus!"

O, blind unquestioning faith of childhood, that could discern the beloved hero in this strange, repulsive guise! Her only thought was of sorrow that she should not have recognized him sooner; that she had not bid him enter; that she had not served him on bended knees, with a silver salver! Would he forgive her and know how she adored him! "My Lord Thaddeus Constantine Count Sobieski, how can I serve you?" Certainly that was the proper way to address him.

"Some monish! I must go."

Ellie had a gold pocket-piece and two dollars in her purse that mamma had given her for spending money. It was her own. O, how lovely to be able to give it to Thaddeus, — Thaddeus suffering and in distress! She no longer envied Miss Beaufort, who probably had been unable to succor him in prison, since he was here and in need. She flew to her room, to her trunk, and with throbbing heart brought her all and laid it in her Thaddeus's hand. It was a very dirty hand, and she

didn't like the kiss with which he thanked her, for it smelled of rum and onions: but she was happy; sorry only that Thaddeus was in such a hurry, and could not stop to tell her any more about Poland and Marsovia and the Palatine.

The book lay neglected on her lap, as she sat with folded hands dreamily wishing that Thaddeus hadn't sold his glittering uniform and sword and his sable pelisse, though it would have been uncomfortable in summer. At last she fell asleep, and there Mehitable found her when, after repeated calls, she failed to come to dinner.

At the abrupt but not unkind touch on her shoulder, the child started up, exclaiming eagerly, "I have seen him! O, I have seen him!"

"Seen who, child?"

"Thaddeus, — Thaddeus himself! And he was poor and hungry, and I gave him my lunch and my gold piece!"

"Is the child crazy? Where's the big silver spoon that was in the bowl? Thaddeus, indeed! a tramp! a vagabond! a thief!"

Poor Ellie! Her dream was shattered rudely enough.

Mehitable got it all out of her by degrees, through cross-questioning; but she felt guilty herself for having given the child the book, and more still for leav-

ing her alone so long. She soothed the heartbroken little girl as well as she could, and honestly took all the blame herself when she told the story to Madame Peyton on her return that evening.

Tim scoured the country for many a day, but nothing more was ever heard of "*dat Taddeus.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

PONTIFEX MAXIMUS.

ELLIE wrote a pretty straight-forward account of "dat Taddeus" to mamma, who laughed heartily over the adventure, and then sent for Dr. John, and gave him Ellie's letter and grandma's to read, and asked how much he supposed a change of latitude had changed Ellie's talent for adventure.

"Pretty much like expecting a leopard to change his spots," said papa.

"Let her work it out; let her work it out. I would rather see her too credulous than too sceptical. It's her application of the law of unselfish love. Her reason is growing. She'll be 'judgmatical' enough one of these days."

So mamma wrote her a kind letter, and sent her some new shoes; and the doctor wrote her a jolly letter, with a pen-and-ink sketch of "the situation," as he called it, recommending that she advise Madame Peyton to buy a strong chain and tie Ellie securely to the four-poster whenever it was necessary to leave her at home; especially with such dangerous predilections for prison-birds like "dat Taddeus."

Meantime the house in Kadesh was astir, getting ready for the ministers. Two or three were to stay at Madame Peyton's over Sunday, and, as we all know, ministers are proverbially a hungry set. Mehitable had plenty to do; with great rounds of spiced beef to prepare, for which Madame Peyton was famous the country round; berry pies and cream cakes, which, for some reason or other, are always provided for ministers; custards and syllabubs, pound-cake and lady-fingers, delicate jellies and blanc-mange, neat's tongues and hams to boil, all of her own curing, and a little better than any to be found elsewhere in New England. No fear of the members of the convention having to content themselves with only the "feast of reason and the flow of soul," but, as Mehitable wisely observed, "I want to go ter church as well as the rest on ye. Cold meat's nuff sight hulsumer'n hot, specially in dog-days." So, except for an occasional broiled chicken or a pan of snowy cream biscuits, with a cup of coffee, not a hot dish was served as long as the convention lasted.

As a whole, Ellie enjoyed the preparation quite as much as the convention. There were so many serious-looking gentlemen in black coats and white neck-cloths to be met at every corner that it seemed like a great many Sundays in succession; but she behaved pretty well, and only got into disgrace once, which,

after all, was not to be wondered at under the circumstances.

There was one clergyman that Ellie quite admired, and was a little afraid of, too, though he was no stranger at Madame Peyton's. He was from Montclare, a parish about ten miles from Kadesh, and occasionally, during the summer, came to preach in the little church at Kadesh, always lunching between services at Madame Peyton's, and not infrequently joining in the four-o'clock dinner, especially if there were an evening service across the river. In that case he sometimes came back and passed the night at Madame Peyton's. With him always came his great Newfoundland dog, a superb fellow, black as a coal, except his four paws and a "ruff and shirt-front," as Uncle Will called it, white as snow. Uncle Will always insisted his name was Pontifex Maximus, and that he governed himself accordingly, he was so dignified and churchly in all his ways. He had a hundred odd tricks and ways that were an unfailing source of amusement to Ellie. She was never tired of putting bits of sugar, of which he was very fond, on the top of his nose, telling him to wait till she said "ten." No matter how she skipped about in counting, he would wait patiently till the magic word was spoken; then, with a toss into the air, he would catch the coveted morsel as it fell, lick his chops, and wait patiently for more.

If she were too long about it, he would give a low, remonstrative growl; but he never offered to take his tidbit without the signal. Then he did enjoy a romp about as much as Ellie herself. They would try races together; if Ellie beat, as sometimes she did, he would roll her over in the grass and pretend to be very angry. He liked nothing better than a hay-field frolic, when he would crouch down while Ellie piled the hay in a great mound over him; then he would jump up, scatter the hay, and chase her till she was ready to do it over again. He would play hide-and-seek "like any Christian," as Mehitable said. If the thing to hide were as small even as a bean, in "so high water," he would find it; if beyond his reach he would jump for it as high as the door-frame.

But one of his performances that amused Ellie the most was at family prayers; though she would as soon, or sooner, have laughed out in church as at family prayers, with Dr. Howard reading and Madame Peyton making the responses. Ponto always knew the right hour for prayers as well as any one in the house, and was the first one to be in his place, which was in the chair nearest his master's; where he sat bolt upright with as serious and devout an aspect as a religiously inclined dog could be supposed to wear. While the reading of the lessons or the psalms was in progress, there he sat immovable, graver than any

deacon. But when the others knelt for prayer, he jumped down and went behind the stove or under a table, and lay at full length. If a hymn were sung, he always howled softly, very softly, a kind of sub-bass. Occasionally he forgot himself, and joined in more vigorously than musically. He was fond of "Dundee" and "China," but a word from his master, "Not so loud, Ponto," would tone him down. Madame Peyton, at first, was rather scandalized by his performances; but Dr. Howard explained that it was a habit of the dog's own taking up, and had not been taught him. That, indeed, he had tried to break him of it by shutting him up before prayer-time; but his howls and cries were so heart-rending, that it was the part of wisdom to let him join in the service.

"And who knows, madame," he would say, "if Ponto has not a glimmering of a higher life, an indistinct perception of a great truth? I, for one, am not quite prepared to deny a possible immortality even to dogs."

But there was one point where Dr. Howard was firm. Ponto should not go to church. So, in good season, before any hint of church-going could have reached Ponto's keen ears, Dr. Howard carried him to the barn and shut all the doors; resisting firmly his great pleading brown eyes, and shutting his ears to the terrific howl and wail, such as only a full-

chested Newfoundland dog is capable of letting out.

The family started orderly enough; Dr. Babson and Dr. Pierce in front, then Madame Peyton and Dr. Howard, followed by Tim pushing Grandpa Peyton's wheeled chair, which was easier than the carriage for him, and Mehitable and Ellie bringing up the rear.

"Where's your parasol, Ellie?"

"O, dear! I laid it down in the buttery with my handkerchief and fan and prayer-book when I went to get a drink of milk."

"Kerless child! now I've got ter go an' fetch it, I reck'n."

"No, no, Mehitable; you walk slowly, I won't be a minute."

But neither parasol nor fan were in the buttery. Then Ellie remembered that she went into the barn to give Ponto a consoling hug, the last thing, and she must have left them there. Of course she must get them; the shortest way was through the buttery window to the wood-shed and into the barn by the little side door. No sooner thought of than done, without once reflecting that the way out for Ponto was as easy as the way in for her. She had to leave the door into the wood-shed ajar; it would be too heavy to open with her hands full; but she shut and bolted it

securely after her when she came back, never dreaming that Ponto was not safe and sound, perhaps fast asleep in the hay-mow.

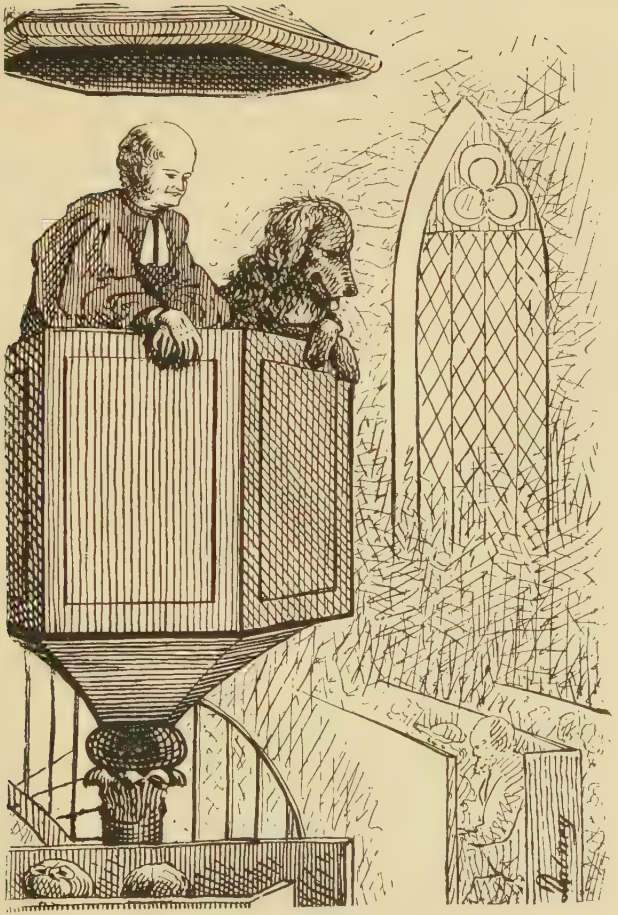
Wise Ponto! No burglar ever stole in more softly than he stole out in the brief, unlucky moment while Ellie was searching for her fan, carefully hiding under the buttery steps till Ellie was out of sight. He knew well enough that he was a culprit, as he crept through lanes and by-ways toward the forbidden land.

A little flushed with her eager haste, Ellie joined Mehitable on the church-steps. No time there to say where she found her property, nor by what means she had entered Ponto's prison-house, and become his unconscious liberator. Once indeed, through the high window that looked over the long western slope of Kadesh hills, Ellie thought she espied Ponto, not bounding in triumph, but skulking secretly along by fences and blackberry-bushes; but she was neither quite sure enough to be quite at ease in the conviction that it was not Ponto, nor quite positive enough to be absolutely miserable in the certainty that it was. So she was alternately happy and unhappy about it, whichever way she viewed it. It was nice for Ponto to be free, if it really were Ponto; and if it were not, why she was glad she had not done any mischief; though it was too bad to think of the poor fellow

shut up in a close, dark barn, this beautiful bright Sunday. She wished she was off on the hills. It was rather tiresome for a little restless girl to sit through the long morning service. It was well enough while there was the excitement of standing and kneeling, and making the responses; the singing Ellie rather enjoyed; but the sermon, one of the old-fashioned sort, an hour and a half by the clock, was more than little girl nature could stand; so she grew first dreamy, then drowsy, then dozy, then fast asleep; waking with a start at the silence which followed the close of the sermon.

Whether the rest of the church had not fairly waked up, or whether Ellie's guilty conscience made her especially keen-sighted, I cannot say; but while every one else was finding the place for the hymn, Ellie saw Ponto stealthily creeping in at the vestry door. No cat could step more lightly than this big blundering fellow when he would. Softly and slowly he moved round the chancel railing, till he disappeared behind the reading-desk, which was large, old-fashioned, and roomy, with its stairway quite concealed from the front.

Ellie almost held her breath. Nobody else had seen him, that was evident. She hoped indeed that Toby, the old warden, would not see him, for if he did it would of course be his duty to attempt to put Ponto



PONTIFEX MAXIMUS.

out by coaxing or force, neither of which would avail much when he had determined to come to church. "If he only will lie down at the foot of the stairs till Dr. Howard gets through," thought poor Ellie. "O, dear! how did he get out, I wonder. I suppose it was the buttery window!"

Meantime the hymn was given out, and Dr. Howard, in a fashion peculiar to himself, was leaning over the cushion with his hands dangling on either side of the hymn-book, which was open more from habit than necessity, while the good doctor read, or rather repeated, one of his few favorite hymns. At the end of the second verse, horror of horrors! Ponto's black head and white frill appeared above the edge of the pulpit side by side with Dr. Howard, who, unobservant of his new assistant, read calmly on to the close of the hymn, while Ponto, with a due sense of the demands of the occasion, was imitating, as far as possible, in attitude and expression, his dignified, reverend master. Even then no one seemed to have noticed him except Ellie; but if he should begin to sing, as he would be sure to, if they sung "China," the case was hopeless!

Was there no good genius, no fairy godmother, to step in and save Ellie from what she felt sure would be lasting disgrace? It was hard enough to keep grave and proper and sedate in full sight of that ab-

surd dog, who absolutely winked like his master, and crossed his paws in exact imitation of his master's hands, while waiting for the tune to be set by Toby's pitch-pipe. With the first notes of "China" Ponto's ears fairly quivered with delight and eagerness. To keep silence under such inspiration, with such opportunity for distinguishing himself as might never again occur, was not be be expected of a dog of his talent and cultivation. The fatal moment had come, and with one long howl of sub-bass that rivalled the Russian Ivanoff himself, Ponto sang!

Ellie shrieked hysterically, laughing and crying in the same breath. Madame Peyton looked amazed, Mehitable indignant. But the latter was equal to the occasion. Taking Ellie by the arm with a vigorous grip, she marched the wretched child out at the side door, through the churchyard, and never stopped till she had her safe at home.

"How did ye, and why did ye? fur o' course ye did. Was it a-purpose, 'Lizabeth Adams? I d'clare, yer ma must ha' the patience of a saint and a Martha!"

"O Mehitable! I did not mean to let him out, though perhaps I should if I had not been afraid — I mean if I had seen him in the barn" —

"Lud sakes, child, what d'ye go t' the bran for? An' heow, I'd like ter know? Here's the barn-door key in

my blessed reticule now;" flourishing, as she spoke, that mammoth piece of ironmongery.

"I — I — got through the buttery window and the shed and the little door. I left my parasol and fan in the corn-bin. O, dear! Will grandma ever believe I mean to be a good girl? O, dear! O, dear!"

Ellie cried and sobbed and howled till she rivalled even Ponto, refusing to be comforted until Dr. Howard himself came in, who, taking the child in his arms, told her stories, and assured her that she was quite forgiven, especially as it had not been an intentional piece of mischief.

But for all that, it was pretty solemn. I guess it would be to any little girl, with a roomful of grown folks and three clergymen, before whom she had disgraced herself and her dear mamma too; for of course they would think mamma never taught her any better. Even Madame Peyton thought she had better stay at home the rest of the day. When the long Sunday was over, and Ellie crept to bed, it was with a great longing for Hetty and Dick.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SURPRISE.

The longest, loneliest summer days come to an end. After all, there was a great deal for Ellie to enjoy even by herself, though it would have been sweeter to share it with Hetty, for whom Alemena Modesta Bird, the old warden's granddaughter, was no substitute. In fact, Alemena Modesta was given to patronizing Miss Ellie, whereas Miss Ellie preferred to do the patronizing herself. They had quarrelled seriously at last about the proper way of making burr baskets, and Miss Alemena had flung all her loose burrs at Ellie, the majority of them lodging in her tangled curls, whence they were dislodged only after great affliction, both to Mehitable and Ellie.

"Sakes alive, child! I've a great mind ter cut yer ha'r off clus t'yer head. Them pesky burrs's jes trampled in! Ef I ketch that Bird gal reound here ag'in I'll dowse her in the cow's mash. Alemena Modesta indeed! Alemena Brazenface! Time Hetty an' Dick *were* here. Ye've hed a pooty skinny time on't fur fun, an' I'm glad they're — O, lud sakes!" —

"O Mehitable! what is it? Tell me quick! What

were you going to say? Is Hetty coming? Is Dick coming? When? How do you know?"

"There, there! I told Miss Peyton I couldn't keep a secret nohow. An' I hev kep it a week an' more. Don't yer ask no more questions; jess red yersel' up an' look out fur the stage. Ef they don't come one day, they will another."

In her delight, Ellie grew very quiet and patient, never making a bit of fuss for all Mehitable's twitching and pulling. The burrs were out at last, and, by dint of a great deal of water and a liberal use of a coarse comb, the tangles were out, though some tears salted the water in the basin before all was finished.

Fortunately, Ellie had not long to wait; her heart was so full of joy, in the glad expectation, that I do not believe she could have eaten or slept, if the coming had been delayed. As it was, she lost only one supper. She atoned for that an hour later.

When the big, lumbering, yellow stage drove up to Madame Peyton's door, Hetty and Dick were really and truly in it; a favorable opportunity having offered to come with a friend of papa's, who had business in Montclare, then, as now, quite a stirring little town.

The rest of the summer flew by like a dream. The children had never before been separated since they could remember. It was nearly two months since that unlucky Fourth of July, and there was so much

to tell, so many questions to ask and answer on both sides, that they were never at a loss for occupation. Grandma had to put a stop to talking in bed after the clock struck nine, for their busy tongues ran like mill-wheels day and night.

To tell all their pleasant excursions, their blackberry hunts, their fishing frolics and picnic parties, would take another volume; to say nothing of their adventures on old Ascutney, or the flood that carried away the great bridge, drowned Mehitable's flock of pet turkeys, landed old Toby's cottage in the middle of Farmer Gooding's mowing, and played every other possible prank of an unruly water sprite, at which every one could laugh, because no one suffered in life or limb. Indeed, the flood was almost a blessing instead of a calamity, for the rebuilding of the bridge gave employment to many who had been idle, and Farmer Gooding's mowing was all the better for the rich dressing of meadow muck that the waters brought down. There were nutting parties and a quilting, to say nothing of an apple bee and a husking. But the story of all these merry-makings must remain untold this time. Enough that the little folks were well and happy, growing ruddier, plumper, and stronger every day, as the summer passed into autumn, and golden October itself was drawing to a close. If once in a while a vague wondering rose of, "Why is vacation so

long this year?" it was only to be glad that it was so; "content to be happy without knowing why."

Yet when, unannounced, papa made his appearance one evening asking if they were ready for home, they found themselves quite ready; for home meant mamma and Dinah and the little ones, quite as much as it meant school and lessons.

Papa looked unusually happy and wise, thought Ellie. "Just as if he were bubbling over with something very nice to tell, if he only had a mind to;" but not a word could the children get of the mighty secret, if such there were.

Even Madame Peyton and Mehitable seemed to share in the delightful mystery. Ellie privately declared that grandma was more like the "really grandma" that she used to be than she had been all summer. Mehitable would burst out into unaccountable fragments of nursery rhymes, in a funny cracked voice that quavered and shook through

"Hippeny, pippeny,
Water my chickiny,
Tre, tro, go to the gutter,
Get the pig's supper.
What o'clock is it?
Buzzard!"

All this betokened great excitement, and when she followed this remarkable performance by a kind of

war-dance in the dairy, when she thought herself unobserved, to a tune with more rhythm than melody, set to words as unintelligible as a Delphic oracle, Mr. Adams thought, in pity for her, it was best to start for home.

The journey back with papa by stage and by rail was as unlike as possible to Ellie's journey in the buggy with Dr. John; but the children found novelty and excitement in things that were weary commonplace to their elders. It was before the days of "prize-candy packets" and such small frauds, but the popcorn-man, or at all events *a* popcorn-man, was indigenous to the route, passing and repassing, alternately with a small lozenge-boy and a peanut-boy. Papa's stock of coppers seemed endless, to the delight of the little buyers as well as the sellers; but no one was sorry when a sniff of east-wind, a glimpse of masts, and a general hurly-burly announced their journey's end.

It was so late when they reached The Cedars, that there was only time for a good deal of indiscriminate hugging and kissing and a comfortable supper, for which, neither apples, popcorn, nor lozenges, to say nothing of the famous lunch grandma had put up for them, had lessened their appetite.

Then papa said, "No story-telling or sight-seeing to-night; not even a question about guinea-hens, ducks,

or chickens; the whole menagerie will be open for inspection to-morrow morning after breakfast, with all its ordinary and extraordinary additions and attractions, surpassing in value and capability even the "What is it" or the far-famed "Gyascutis," which last is a very wild beast only lately arrived, which might — I don't know what it might *not* do if it were disturbed. *Quieta non movere;* which, being freely translated, means, Go to bed as quietly as possible."

"Tread softly that the blind mole may not hear a footfall."

With finger on her lips and a smile looking out of her eyes, it was Aunt Margaret who went up to bed with them instead of mamma, who, after the first boisterous greeting, was content to sit quite still in papa's big chair, while Aunt Margaret and Dinah supplied all the wants of the hungry travellers.

Hetty and Ellie found comfort in taking their beloved dollies to bed with them. It was a long time since Blondine and Blondette had seen their little mammas; indeed they had lain with their eyes shut tight for so many weeks, it was a wonder they ever opened them again at all. To make sure of it, Ellie made Blondette wink a great many times very fast before she was content to kiss her rosy cheeks and cuddle her in her arms for good-night. Once indeed, in the middle of the night, Ellie woke Hetty, and said she

was sure she heard Blondine crying, and was afraid she had tumbled out of bed; but Hetty said no, that Ellie must have dreamed it. So Ellie, who was sleepy and tired, turned over, and oddly enough dreamed the same thing too or three times before morning.

At breakfast Aunt Margaret turned out papa's coffee, and said to the eager children that mamma would breakfast in her room, and wished to have Ellie, Hetty, and Dick, bring up her breakfast when they were quite through with theirs.

When the procession was ready to march, Ellie, owing to a tendency she had for falling up stairs, especially if she had anything in her hands, took the graham toast and the napkin, Hetty the pretty covered chocolate-cup, while Master Dick brought up the rear with a nice bit of steak and a baked potato.

Mamma was sitting in the great white frilled chair before a bright fire (the October mornings were already chilly); a little table at her right hand was ready for the tempting breakfast they had brought without any mishap, and now arranged with loving dexterity, so that mamma should have it "hot and hot."

Just as mamma was finishing the last bit of toast, a little noise was heard, — "Such a little tiny noise! like a cry in a box!" Ellie said. Then it came again,

and Ellie exclaimed, "It is Blondine, Hetty; I knew it was last night, when you said I dreamed it. You were too bad to shut her in her box."

"Now, Ellie, you know our dolls can't cry unless we squeeze 'em."

"Pooh, Ellie, it's a live dolly, I bet. It's baby May, of course."

"Nonsense, Dick; baby May hasn't cried so little and squeaky as that, not for years and years!"

Baby May was two years and a half old; but Ellie's ideas of time, space, and quantities were known to be slightly inaccurate.

Mamma enjoyed their wondering speculation for a few minutes, while they listened attentively but vainly for the renewal of the thin faint sounds which had attracted their attention. All was quiet. Then mamma told them to go softly into the dressing-room, and see what they would find.

Wonder of wonders! delight of delights! There stood baby May's pretty bassinet, freshly trimmed with white muslin and pink ribbons, and in it, like a little downy rose-leaf, a real live dolly! It was time for her waking, or mamma would not have sent the children in, for their exclamations of joy, surprise, and delight were not to be silenced. It was so funny to see the little face wrinkle and pucker like an old lady's, to see the little pink fists doubled up like a prize-fighter's,

and its tiny dot of a mouth open wider and wider till every other feature seemed to disappear in the presence of the astounding volume of sound that issued from this small specimen of humanity.

Dick looked slightly disconcerted. "I say, mamma, does it do that a great deal? I think it must be all hollow."

"No, dear. She is frightened and a little hungry, too; she wants some breakfast as well as mamma. Then you will see what a darling rosy-posy she is, to be sure."

"I say, Dick, if you don't like to hear her cry, — and *I* think it is a beautiful noise myself, — you take the waiter down, and come up again when we have given her some breakfast."

Nothing loath, Master Dick departed. It is not given to brothers, or even to papas, to justly appreciate the charms of a new-comer, especially when exercising its lungs. But Hetty and Ellie fairly devoured their little sister with their eyes and their kisses, too, when, each in turn, mamma let them take the precious treasure in their arms, and hold it for a few minutes. It was natural enough that Hetty should know how to tend and hold it, for she had shown a motherly instinct, not only with her dolls, but even with baby May, whom she was very fond of tending till she grew too heavy for her to lift or carry;

but for Ellie it was a new development entirely. Perhaps her love for Blondette had something to do with it. In tending the large, dainty French doll, she had grown gentler in her ways, handling her with very different touch from that she had been wont to bestow on rag dolls or even china ones. At all events, Hetty herself or even mamma could not have held the darling little baby more correctly or tenderly than our heedless Ellie; while a look of wondering rapture and awe, surpassing that with which she had greeted the gift of Blondette, fairly transfigured her face.

I do not know whether mamma had thought of it before or whether it was an inspiration born of the moment, but she said softly to Ellie, "Would you like to name your little sister?"

"May I? may I?" said Ellie, eagerly.

"If you name her, my darling, she will be specially yours, you know; not to take all the care of exactly, but to think of when you are tempted to do wild, reckless things; for you would have to ask yourself whether you would like to have little sister do the same things as she grew older. You would have to remember to set her a good example."

Ellie's face grew very thoughtful and serious.

"Don't you think she is very beautiful, mamma?"

"I think she is a dear, sweet baby, and I rather

think all babies do look beautiful to their mammas; but perhaps Dick would not call her a beauty."

Even Hetty had to qualify her admiration of baby's personal attractions, by saying she thought she would be beautiful by and by when she had some hair and was not quite so red; but Ellie was loyal to her faith. Perhaps already the child was proving her election and birthright, as one of those whom Indra's priceless gift, of seeing the Unseen in the Seen, stamps as true poets.

"Mamma, I would like to call her Ruth. I think the name is lovely, and I remember Aunt Margaret told me once it meant 'beauty.'"

"So it does, dear Ellie. It is a lovely name, and was my own mother's name, too; but you did not know that. She shall be called Ruth. You, my darling, are to do all you can to help to make her beautiful in heart and life as long as you both shall live."

A mother of less discernment than Mrs. Adams would have hesitated either to say what she had already said to Ellie, or to do as she began to immediately and continued to till it ceased to be a wonder. Without taxing the child's physical strength in any way, mamma let Ellie feel that Ruth was her charge; that she was responsible for her quiet naps, her regular carriage ride, for the putting away of her pretty sacks and blanket and hood, and, later, for the right

temperature and taste of her porringer of milk. It was for Ellie that little Ruth first smiled; it was Ellie who could coax her to stop crying; it was Ellie who first discovered she could sit alone; who spied the first tiny pearl in the rosy mouth; who held her hand when she first tottered to mamma. I think Ellie's sense of responsibility, her first practical application of Dr. John's teaching, came with the gift of her baby sister, and the wise confidence that mamma placed in "heedless Ellie."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GRANDFATHER'S CHRISTMAS.

What with "that blessed baby" and school lessons, it was Thanksgiving almost before they knew it. There was no snow, which made it seem unlike winter too; all the better as it proved, for a necessary journey in midwinter was before Mrs. Adams.

Grandfather Peyton had been very feeble for some time; as the autumn passed away, it seemed probable that he, too, would sink to rest with the full-fruited earth. He longed to hear mamma's voice, and to touch little Ruth, whom he could never see; it would be a comfort to grandma, also. It was decided that, after Thanksgiving was over, mamma would take Ruth and Patsey, and go once more to Kadesh, to stay with Madame Peyton till her faithful service was ended, when she would come back with mamma and make her home at The Cedars.

As it drew near Christmas, it seemed pretty certain that it would be a very quiet time. Colonel Peyton was still living, but that was all. Letters from Uncle Will brought the unwelcome news of shipwreck, with the added cause for thankfulness that, though the

brave ship went down, no lives were lost; but it made his return indefinite.

By common consent, there was no thought of Christmas merry-making at The Cedars; but for all that, Hetty and Ellie and Dick had a very happy Christmas, as you will see. To understand how it all happened though, we must run away from The Cedars and the little folks there, to the house of a certain little girl named Nellie Alden, the same little girl whom we heard of as Goldy, and who was such a success as the Peri Alcmenahrah.

Nellie was the well-beloved and only daughter of very indulgent parents, who, however, had not spoiled their darling yet, spite of all the wise head-shakes and shoulder-shrugs of those who disbelieved in happiness as a means of grace, as we shall see in the next chapter.

But before we hear about "Nellie's Christmas" and how Dick and Hetty and Ellie helped, we will take a last look at grandpa, bidding a long good-by to him, and another good-by, only for a season, I trust, to grandma and mamma, Mehitable and Tim, and dear old Kadesh itself. You would hardly know it in the white stillness of December, for the beautiful wilderness of green forest, hillside, and meadow, that made it the pride of its inhabitants and the delight of summer tourists. The great river in icy fetters, the busy

mill-wheels silent, the winding roads, that in summer time the eye could follow for miles over the green uplands, like a narrow brown ribbon, quite obliterated in one unbroken white expanse.

Few people had any call to be abroad; the farmers attended to the wants of their live-stock, and in their tool-shops and barns made new and repaired old implements. Shopping was a thing little known; every farmer's wife spinning and knitting, and many of them weaving the material to clothe themselves and their households. The winter was the time for that sort of work, and you could hear the loom and wheel in almost any farm-house you entered. Occasional sledding parties, tea-drinkings, and a donation party to one or the other of the ministers, were the excitements of a winter life that would seem very tame to-day, to most country towns.

The railroad did not come within many miles of Kadesh; but twice each week, even in midwinter, the stage-coach brought the mails, unless the roads were too heavily drifted; passengers, however, were few and far between. The mail-day was the market-day, if that could be called market-day, when the farmers brought eggs and butter, or a stray turkey or goose, to barter for tea and coffee or a little "loaf" for the "old ooman." On all ordinary occasions, maple sugar, well clarified, was used for "short

sweet'nin'," and molasses for "long sweet'nin'," many even preferring this last in their coffee; but it was a poor household which had not in its best cupboard a sugar-loaf, in its blue paper cone, ready to be broken in glittering little cubes, with the aid of a mallet and chisel, if the parson came "to drink a dish o' tea."

If any one were sick or in trouble, the news spread quickly. Every one knew every one else in the parish, even on the outlying farms, and esteemed it a privilege, as well as a duty, in case of sickness, to watch at night, to nurse, to tend, to lift, with a gentleness and tenderness unlooked for among rough-handed, rough-visaged farmers.

If the village, as a whole, respected and feared Madame Peyton rather than loved her, it was far otherwise that they regarded the blind old Colonel, who, helpless as he had now been for many years, was yet remembered as the handsome, stalwart gentleman, who had always a merry joke for the young men, a bit of pleasant, harmless flattery for the pretty girls, praise for the farmer's well-kept lands and cattle, and appreciation for their good wives' wonderful quilts and incomparable dairies. The village children were never happier than when on a bright Saturday afternoon they saw Colonel Peyton's chair under the great elm-tree, and the dear old man himself leaning forward heavily on his gold-headed cane, with his head turned to catch the first

sound of their coming steps. The little ones knew they might rifle his pockets of the store of peppermints and lozenges they were sure to find there, while the older ones listened eagerly to his stories of real battles by land and sea, tiger hunts in African forests, and rides in a howdah on a real elephant in Indian jungles. But these were things of the past now; they, as well as their parents, knew that the Colonel's days were numbered. There was really nothing they could do, except to express, sometimes awkwardly enough, their desire to be of service; but it touched Madame Peyton deeply to see them coming, day after day, well pleased if only they might hear, "The Colonel is comfortable."

He was glad to listen to the Christmas bells once more; and when the children from the Sunday-school asked if they might sing the carols under his window, he insisted on having them in the hall instead; and when they had done singing "God rest you, Merry Gentlemen," and "The First Nowel," Mehitable had a nice hot bowl of bread and milk and a Christmas cake ready for them; and each child had a silver piece in remembrance of the dear old Colonel, who would never hear the carols again till in his ears they should blend with "the voice of harpers harping with their harps, while they sung as it were a new song before the throne;" till the blind eyes should be opened

in the Golden City, the light whereof is the Lamb of God.

As the children passed noiselessly out into the white glory of the Christmas morning, Colonel Peyton asked to have his chair rolled to the window, that they might see him, if he could not see them. The sunlight streamed full on the old man's face; his soft white hair, as it glittered in the sunshine, was like a silver halo. He turned his sightless eyes to the blue sky; his lips moved as if in prayer or benediction.

After a little while mamma asked if he would lie down.

"No, dear. I would like to go from here."

No one knew what he meant, I think. But when, an hour later, Madame Peyton offered him his cordial, there was no answer.

He was gone.

The look of joy and peace upon the old man's face forbade all sorrow and tears. He, too, was keeping Christmas in the Golden City, New Jerusalem, beholding the brightness and joining in the angels' song, —

"*In terra Pax hominibus*
Et in excelsis Gloria."

CHAPTER XXIV.

NELLIE'S CHRISTMAS.

To fully understand this, we must start with a week before Christmas.

Scene: Mr. Alden's luxurious study, where Mrs. Alden and Nellie are waiting for papa, and beguiling the time with pleasant plans about the coming holidays.

"Mamma, I wish I could have Christmas my own way."

"What does my dear little daughter mean when she says that? I should have said there never was a little girl who always had so much that was beautiful and expensive for Christmas."

"That's just it, mamma. That isn't the sort of Christmas I want. There isn't anything new for me to have. I've dolls and books and games and a playhouse, and ever so much jewelry, and ever so many pictures. O, I don't know what there is more in the whole world to give me! What I want now is to give something to somebody myself."

"I am sure, my dear Nellie, you always do that every

Christmas. Didn't you give Hattie Lawrence a Paris doll, and Emma Newton a jewelry-box, and"—

"O, dear mamma, that's just it! I give the girls money presents, and then they give me money presents, and they count just how much each costs, and I am vexed if they buy anything handsomer than I do. Somehow, that isn't the Christmas I want."

"Well, my darling, what is it? I don't quite understand yet."

"I should like so much to give presents to somebody that couldn't give presents back. I should like to make ever so many little boys and girls happy; happier than they ever were in all their lives. They shouldn't know that anything was going to be at all, and then it would be just like fairy godmothers. O mamma darling, if you only would let me! I wouldn't ask for a single present for myself."

"Here comes papa, Nellie dear. Let us consult him. I can't settle any such momentous question without him, you know."

"Papa, dearest! you will, won't you, and you needn't buy me anything, not even the new pony! O, I shall be so happy!"

"I'm delighted, my dear, to be excused from the pony, but must know the cost of my freedom. I never yet knew a young woman exceedingly ready to give up one extravagance that she hadn't another all cut and

dried and ready for exhibition. Out with it!" By this time papa had laid aside his fur-lined coat, and tossed his seal-skin mittens into mamma's basket for an odd stitch. "Come, madcap, you are not too big yet to sit on my knee. That's the best place to tell a story."

Miss Nellie needed no second invitation. Papa seated himself in the big arm-chair before the blazing wood-fire, and the little girl climbed into her favorite nestling-place, while the hickory logs snapped and crackled in the most approving fashion.

"I was telling mamma that I should like to have Christmas this year all my own way, and give lots of presents, instead of making them."

"Hoity toity! That means a long bill at the book-store, a longer one at the jeweller's, and a wagon-load from the bazaar. Thank you: I'd rather buy the pony."

"No, no, papa! That isn't it at all. I should like to have a Christmas-tree and a Christmas party, and have Hetty and Ellie Adams, and Dick and Emma and Hattie, and two or three more to help me. Then I'd like to invite ever so many poor children, boys and girls who never had Christmas, and give every one of 'em something useful and every one of 'em something pretty that wasn't useful, and any quantity of candy, and cake, and nuts, and apples, and oranges. I read

a story once about such a tree, and I think it would be nicer than any Christmas I ever had yet."

"H'm! What next will come into your curly pate, I wonder? It strikes me, though, mother, that it has a kind of Christmas flavor, this plan of Nellie's. What do you think about it?"

"My dear husband, if Nellie is beginning to learn the blessedness of giving instead of receiving, I should be the last to discourage it."

"You'd have the worst of it, mother, — the rumpus and the riot and the house upside down. I'll pay the bills, if you can stand the rest."

"Agreed. Likely enough, however, before the week is out, the child will be tired of her scheme."

"Not I, mamma. O, I thank you ever so much! We must do it all ourselves, — the bother and real work, I mean. I'm going right over to Ellie Adams's now, this very minute."

"Stop a minute, Nellie! Not quite so fast, if you please. It's tea-time now. I know a better plan, too. You can tell me who you would like to have for committee, — the boys and girls I mean; make out a list, and while we are at supper, John can go round to the houses, and ask them all to come over here this evening. You shall have the back drawing-room to yourselves all the evening, if you wish."

"You dear, darling, sweet mamma! Was there

ever such a lovely mamma? Here's my list all ready. I made it out this morning, — to have that fun any way, even if you said no; though I was almost sure you would say yes. Ellie and Hetty and Dick Adams to begin with, and they are close by now, you know, for their mamma has gone to Kadesh, and they are making a little visit at their Aunt Emily's; and Hattie Lawrence and Emma Newton and Jamie Tower" —

"Jamie Tower?" Why, my dear little girlie, isn't he the little lame boy? He can't help you."

"O, yes, indeed he can! He was the one who first told us about it, and read the pretty German story to us. He can sing carols, too; his voice is just like an angel's."

"Very well; you shall decide for yourself. Let us see; this is Monday, and Christmas is one week from Wednesday. You will have to be pretty busy."

John took the messages. At half-past seven the whole committee had assembled. Such an important look as every little face wore! But not one word till the elders had disappeared and the field was clear. Then Nellie, glad to unburden herself of the weighty, joyful secret, shouted, "We may, we may! Papa said yes, and mamma said yes! We are to do just what we like, and buy what we like, and invite whom we like, and have the back parlor; and mamma won't mind the

muss, and papa will pay the bills. Isn't it lovely? Now, Jamie, tell us what to do. We must all do just what Jamie says."

Jamie was a quiet little fellow, with great, dreamy gray eyes, often dim from pain, and sleepless, weary nights, but now bright with happiness and joyous with the thoughts of the good times coming.

Dick wheeled the little fellow's chair up to the table; the rest crowded round to hear and to obey.

There were lists made out, not of the boys and girls they were to invite (that would come afterwards), but of things that would be nice to have for boys, things that would be nice for girls, things that would look pretty on the tree, and things that would be useful for boys and girls.

Dick Adams was to get the tree; he always knew all the jolly places in the woods for nut-trees and fir-trees. Ellie would cover bright balls. Hetty would dress dolls. Hattie and Emma knew how to make lovely horns of fringed paper. The scarfs and the clouds and the mittens they would have to buy. Nellie was to see to those, because papa knew about the wholesale stores, where everything was so much cheaper. And what was Jamie to do? O, Jamie will string the popcorn to festoon the tree with.

"I say, Nellie, we must sing our carol when the children come in."

"Yes, indeed, we will. Let us try it over once now. Did you bring it? Girls, Jamie has written us a carol to sing to 'Little Birdie.' That we all know. It's real nice; he sang it to me yesterday."

"That's just splendid!" cried Ellie; "please, Jamie, sing it to us first, then we will all sing it together."

"Merry Christmas, blithesome Christmas,
Day of all the year the best!
Birthday of the Christ our Saviour,
In whom all the world is blest.
Carol then a joyous song,
Let us all the sound prolong,
Merry Christmas, blithesome Christmas,
Joy and love to thee belong!

"Garlands gay and shining holly
Deck our fragrant Christmas pine,
While with merry Christmas greetings,
Lovingly our hearts entwine.
Carol then a joyous song,
Let us all the sound prolong,
Merry Christmas, blithesome Christmas,
Joy and love to thee belong!"

Sweetly it sounded with the children's pure, clear voices. It was a whole Christmas itself; while little Jamie, with glowing cheeks and glistening eyes, was prouder and far happier than the poet-laureate himself.

How the days flew by! The dolls were so lovely when Hetty had dressed them, that baby May cried for them all, one after the other. Ellie's balls were such bouncers and so handsome, that Harry had to have one any way; they had cork inside, and were covered with bright morocco, red, white, and blue pretty enough for any boy, rich or poor.

Such horns as Emma and Hattie made! Pink and blue and silver and green and gold and scarlet and every color that could be thought of. Then the filling of them was such good fun! Papa sent home whole boxes from the confectioner's; every lovely thing that ever was made for a sugar-plum party. The horns were crammed so full they would hardly stay shut, even with the red, white, and blue ribbons that tied them.

Then the yards of popcorn that dear Jamie had patiently threaded! There was a half-bushel basket full certainly when it was done.

The hoods and scarfs and mittens were enchanting. Nellie picked them all out herself, for papa said she was to please herself straight through.

The week was over almost before one knew it; but everything was ready, and right after breakfast, Christmas morning, the little folks were gathered in the back parlor. Only one promise had been made by the indulgent mamma; the light furniture and

statuary that might get injured had been moved out of the room, and the carpet was covered with the white covers made for Nellie's birthday ball. This gave plenty of room for the generous evergreen, securely planted in a square box neatly covered with mosses and sprigs of green. The chandelier and the mirrors, the brackets and windows, were festooned with long wreaths of green; sprays of shining holly, bright with scarlet berries, were stuck in everywhere till the whole room fairly laughed with its own quaintness and brightness, and said "*Christmas*," as plain as talking, even without the word in letters a foot long that Dick put up on a white ground just opposite the arch.

Busy as bees the little folks worked all day, hardly sparing time for lunch, though John brought the tray of chocolate, sandwiches, and turnovers to the very door. By three o'clock it was all done; the last bright ribbon knotted, the last wreath adjusted, and the pretty vases filled with fragrant green-house flowers. Then papa and mamma must come in and see.

Such a pretty sight! fairyland itself! At all events, fairy fingers had been at work, or, what is better, loving hearts and willing hands. Papa and mamma both pronounced it charming; and when papa gave Nellie a box of glittering balls and pendants, such as sparkle on German Christmas-trees, all ready to hang on the tips of the loaded branches, the result was perfect.

"But, Nellie, where's your company? Who's coming?"

"O, we don't know, and that's the fun. We've got presents for twenty boys and twenty girls. Dick and Ellie are going out to invite them, — just the first twenty poor, ragged little boys and girls they meet. Dick will give each of the boys a red ticket, with the number of the house and street, and Ellie will give each girl a blue ticket just the same. Jamie printed them: aren't they lovely?

"Then the children are all going home to tell their mothers they've been invited to Christmas, and wash their faces and hands and get leave. Then they will come back here at five o'clock. When they are all here, we want you, papa, to light the candles for us, you are so tall. Then Jamie is to sing the carol; and when he finishes the first verse, Dick will open the folding-doors, and the children will all come in while we sing the other verse.

"Won't it be lovely? I wish I was a poor little girl who hadn't ever seen a Christmas-tree and was going to have a lovely, lovely time!"

"No, Nellie darling, you will be even happier than that, for you will be giving instead of receiving. Come, my little girlie, if you are to be dressed there is no time to lose."

Nellie had insisted that they should all honor the

Christmas party with the pretty dresses they would have worn had it been the usual Christmas ball instead of her "vagrant party," as Dick's papa insisted on calling it. Every one of the girls looked like little fairies when they came back; as for Nellie herself she might have been Cinderella at the ball, or the veritable fairy godmother, in her floating white muslin, blue ribbons, and little high-heeled silver slippers. Her golden hair might indeed have been a fairy's with its crown of rosebuds. At the last moment Jamie put into her hand a silver wand he had been winding for her. She gave a funny little whirl on tiptoe, waved her magic wand to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west, saying, "Gather, gather, gather, gather! Hear and obey!"

The clock struck five and the door-bell rang at the same instant. A funny set were the children that Ellie and Dick had gathered from highways and by-ways. I think that fashionable spot never before entertained such a crowd of thoroughly disguised angels.

There had been some decided attempts at "smarting up," besides the face-and-hands washing; and there were some faces among the forty that would have been fair and comely, with such surroundings as they now beheld for the first time in their bleak, barren, loveless lives; but, ah, too many bore the stamp of

NELLIE'S CHRISTMAS.

squalor, hunger, and abuse, that water could not wash away, nor a few hours of happiness utterly efface.

The warmth, the perfume, the lights, the strange beauty of the rooms (strange to their unaccustomed eyes), were in themselves an intoxication. What was coming they did not, could not, dream. Had they, then and there, passed out into the cold, dark night, they would have remembered as a bright vision those few minutes of waiting.

Then far away, as it were an angel singing, came Jamie's sweet voice in the simple carol.

"Thin the wall busted clane open," Pat Mooney said, when he gave his account of it at home; "an' here, in the shine uv it loike the thayter, th' iligintest grane traa ye iver sit eyes on, an' lamps growin' on th' inds uv the things, an yaller oranges an' stars out uv hiven, an' rid apples, an' little fairies loike a straddlin' uv they branches thimsil's, an' twinklers an' sparklers, the loike the Howly Vargin hasn't got hirsel' anint th' altar. An' jist wrathes uv snow loike ribbons strakng down from the virry top to the bottom av it. An' angels a singin' as ye could ha' b'lieved it wor Hiven, an' St. Agnes hirsel' not that luvely! The swate cratur's wings wor out o' sight; but she had em sure. An' ivry boy had a striped scarf, yaller an' blue an' rid, an' a pair uv mittens wud ha warrmed ould Harry Gill's fingers thimsel's,

as we rade on, that niver yit got warrm afther chasin' poor Goody Blake an' callin' her a thafe, by token he begridged her a wee bit kindlin'; an' ivry boy hed a rid, white, and blue ball, with thraa cheers. We giv' 'em, we did; an' ivry gal hed a scarf an' a cloud that rid it wud warrm ye only the luk av it; an' a doll fit loike for a saint, wid pink an' blue an' silver; an' the pooty horns o' swatemates, an' sugar-plums, that full ye had to ate 'em to kape 'em; an' oranges, an' apples, an' cookies mor'n we could ate, an' to carry home, an' a 'Merry Christmas to ye, an' thank ye fur comin' to my party,' and sich a swate smile, the Howly Vargin must hev luked loike the same, an' the swate music all the while!

"An' it's tin o'clock, begorra! Sure an' I wudn't 'a blaved it wor sax. Hiven itsel' wud be mighty short if its half so good as Miss Nilly's Christmas party!"

And what did the little girl herself think about it? We must listen to her last words to mamma, after her happy little friends had echoed a dozen good-nights, and the white-curtained bed stood ready to receive her.

"Darling mamma, it was just lovely, every way! I don't think I ever quite knew before what it was to keep Christmas. It's the *giving*, not the *getting*."

And so it was that the Christmas angel of love and peace spread its wings on Kadesh, on Beacon Hill, and at the Cedars.